NEW SERIAL JUST STARTED.

Short Stories.

No. 741.] Week ending March 14, 1903. [Price One Penny.

John Davenal put a hand to his throat. He seemed to be struggling for breath. "Dead!" he faltered. "Hannah dead! Hannah—murdered!" Then he fainted.

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(A Dramatic Incident from our New Serial Story, "HELD APART." See Inside.)

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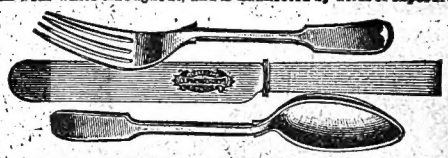

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NEW SERIAL. **START TO-DAY.**

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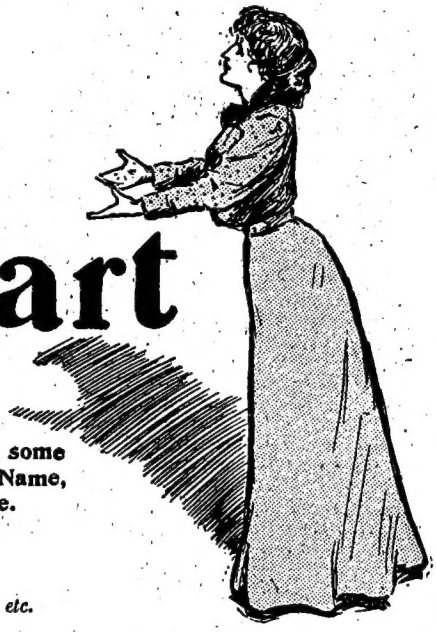

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By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "The Golden Dwarf," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Moira Davenal is sitting in the little cottage on Groudle Quay busy with her ribbon work. Sir Guy Vanbrugh is talking to her.

"Moira, have I the least little bit of a chance?"

"I—I don't know, Sir Guy," she falters. "I never thought about you seriously; and they would all say I married you for your money!"

"Then there is a chance for me," he says, biting his lip. "Moira, I love you so much. Won't you——"

He pauses. There is a heavy step in the hallway of the cottage, and a burly figure enters the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Davenal. I'm off to London for the week-end and was just leaving a message for you with your daughter. How goes on the task of raising the *Sylph?*"

"I've found the last hole, Sir Guy," says John Davenal, who is a diver engaged in raising Sir Guy's yacht. "She'll soon be afloat."

After Sir Guy has gone a sailor appears at the door singing in drunken tones the scrap of a chorus:

"*Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
Tell her that she'll never see her—her sailor any more."

"I want to see Davenal—John Davenal," he says thickly.

The diver rises to his feet.

"Hullo, Hartigan!" he remarks loudly. "Glad to see you. Come in and make yourself comfortable."

While Moira goes out on an errand a conversation takes place between the two men, from which it appears that Moira is really Hartigan's daughter. Davenal agrees to pay him £50 a year so that he may keep her.

The sailor—really a ship's steward—sits back in his chair and begins to sing again the drunken chorus.

He halts abruptly, for the door slowly opens, and a blind woman comes in.

Dennis Hartigan recognises her as his sister Kate. She tells her brother that she heard the song he was singing—sung in just the same way—once when she was sitting on a breakwater at Groudle. She also adds that the man who was singing said, evidently to someone with him: "This is out far enough. In with it"; after which there was a splash.

Hannah Davenal (Hartigan's wife and the diver's sister) is maid to Lady Tarleton. She is possessed of a secret with which she continually blackmails her mistress.

"For nearly twenty years," says Hannah Davenal, "I have had your and your daughter's future at my mercy. The bubble I helped you to blow I could have pricked—how completely you cannot guess—at any moment."

Then she bends over her mistress and whispers in her ear.

Lady Tarleton pales. "It's a lie!" she says hoarsely—"a clever lie! The thing was impossible, impossible!"

Hannah Davenal smiles. "I did it, my lady," she answers. "You can have proof. Go down to Groudle Tower and look. My husband helped me."

That afternoon Lady Tarleton and Hannah Davenal go down to Groudle Tower, and together they make a mysterious journey at midnight.

The following day, at the Half Brick Inn at Groudle, Hannah encounters her husband, whom she advises to leave Groudle.

"You have considered my offer?" says Lady Tarleton to her maid, as the latter prepares her for bed.

"I am doing so, my lady," is the reply.

"Five thousand pounds," murmurs Lady Tarleton, "for the name and whereabouts of the child."

"I will think of it, my lady," says the maid.

In the early morning Lady Tarleton is aroused by persistent knocking at her door, followed by the butler's voice saying that her maid Davenal has been discovered dead in bed with a scent of chloroform in the room.

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FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Cry in the Dawn.

"A pillow—chloroform—Davenal!"

Lady Tarleton repeated the words mechanically. Wide-eyed and pale to the lips, she was staring at the agitated man-servant who had blurted out so abruptly the terrible intimation which still rang in her ears. The butler watched her anxiously—she seemed on the point of swooning, though the first cold light of the winter day, stealing lividly through the long and dusky corridors of Groudle Tower, showed that the colour was already returning to her blanched features.

"Yes, my lady," he said, "we've done our best to bring her round with hartshorn and brandy, but she's gone, my lady, quite gone—murdered in her bed and none of us the wiser."

His mistress shuddered. "Murdered!" she whispered. "Oh, it can't be, it is impossible!"

The butler shook his head. "It's too true, my lady," he rejoined; "we might have thought she'd accidentally taken an overdose of the stuff, for sleeplessness or toothache. But the pillow had been held down over her face, there were black finger-marks on it, and under it was a towel that smelt of chloroform. I went through an operation once at the Carlisle Hospital, your ladyship, you may remember, and I know the smell."

Lady Tarleton stood motionless in the doorway of her room. She had put her hand to her side and she was breathing heavily.

"It—it is most mysteriously horrible," she said; "who can have had any reason to do such a ghastly thing? Are there—are there any signs of robbery?"

"No, my lady," rejoined the man-servant, "the room is otherwise undisturbed." Lady Tarleton knitted her brows.

"You had better send for the police," she told him, "and I suppose, a doctor, immediately. Is there a maid in the house that can help me to dress?"

"I believe so, my lady," was the answer; "I will send one of the upper housemaids to your ladyship—a very neat, willing young person. Your ladyship's orders with regard to a doctor and the police shall be carried out. Will your ladyship wait for a fire to dress by?"

His mistress looked back into the vast, sombre bedroom, dimly illuminated by the candle she had so hurriedly lighted. A shimmer of the growing day penetrated the faded venetians that covered the windows, and added to the desolation of the feathery ashes that littered the yawning grate. She shivered again and replied in the affirmative.

The butler bowed and went away, an incongruous figure with his jacket buttoned askew about his collarless throat, and his trousers caught into the heels of his slippers. Lady Tarleton retreated into her room, shut the door, staggered to her bed, and sank down upon it. A hoarse, almost involuntary exclamation broke from her.

"Deliverance!" she said, "deliverance! If—if only she had told me the whereabouts of the child!"

The speaker put out a hand to a bedside table, on which she had set the lighted candle. A cut-glass flask of smelling salts lay by the latter. She opened the silver cap and inhaled the strong vapour. The cold of the raw morning had pierced her to the marrow, and she was shivering keenly. Yet a wan, mirthless smile lifted the corners of her mouth and flickered in her eyes. With an impatient motion she dragged the bedclothes about her, and sat thinking.

A tap at the door heralded the arrival of a trim, rosy-cheeked country lass, with the requisites for a fire. A little awed by her mistress's presence, which she acknowledged with a species of curtesy, she lit the gas, knelt by the bleak hearth, and speedily kindled a cheerful blaze.

"Did *you* hear any noise in the night?" Lady Tarleton asked her sharply, as she was rising to leave the apartment. The girl curtsied once more.

"No, your ladyship," she said, "not a sound—which is odd, my lady, for I sleep in the next room to that Miss Davenal had, it having been empty before she came to the Tower with your ladyship."

"Quite so," observed her mistress frigidly; "that will do, you can say that I am ready to dress now."

"Yes, my lady," she was answered, and the kitchen lass withdrew. A few moments afterwards a quiet, well-mannered girl, in a dark gown, entered, and, with deft movements, began to assist in the elaborate toilet by which Lady Tarleton habitually endeavoured to conceal the ravages that time had made in a once florid and imperious beauty.

When at length her attendant drew up the blinds and allowed the harsh light of the gloomy winter day to fill the room, the elder woman was her own suave self again. The air of the chamber had grown pleasantly warm, and she shivered no longer as she sat by the fire for the maid to fasten her shoes. Also the wan, mirthless smile had died away from the corners of her mouth. But it still lingered in her eyes. The tragedy whose shadow had fallen upon Groudle Tower meant to her a welcome, if mysterious emancipation from bonds that had chafed her for nearly twenty years.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

"I had a Message for you."

"Kit, dear, won't you put on a hat? It is very cold this morning, though there is a little bit of sun."

Moira Davenal was calling from the door of the diver's cottage towards the gate which opened on the quay. Beside it stood Kate Hartigan, the March wind fluttering her skirts and blowing over her sightless eyes the soft brown tendrils about her forehead. She turned with a rebellious gesture.

"I'm all right, Mollie," she retorted, "don't worry about me, please. Groudle air never does me any harm, I'm too used to it."

For answer Moira went back into the cottage and emerged with the gay woollen tam-o'-shanter she herself used occasionally. She brought it to the blind girl and put it on the latter's head with gentle fingers. Kate Hartigan caught her hands and gave them a remorseful squeeze.

"I'm a bit of a vixen, Mollie," she exclaimed, "and you are an angel. But I do wish he would come—he's only been twice since he came back to Groudle. He says he's looking up old chums—well, if his sister's not more to him than friends he's as good as forgotten for years and years. I—I wish he'd stopped away."

The blind girl shrugged her shoulders, her child-like petulance changing once more to contrition.

"There," she added, "of course I know I'm unreasonable, Mollie; men like to be with men, and smoke, and tell stories, and swear now and then. But I did want Dennis to be fond of me, and I don't believe he really is."

She put an arm round Moira's waist.

"Tell me, dear," she said, "is he what you would call handsome? Do you think all the Groudle girls will set their caps at him?"

Moira frowned and gazed out at the ruffled waters of the small harbour, flecked with touches of foam that flashed brightly in the fitful March sunbeams. She seemed suddenly to behold the face of the returned ship's steward. Tanned, square, bloated, with its animal jaw and bullying black eyes, it revolted her unspeakably. Yet she knew that his bold self-possession and swaggering demeanour, his broad, strong figure and air of disdainful experience, would be likely enough to impress the young womanhood of Groudle.

"I can't be sure about setting their caps at him, Kit," she replied evasively, "but I don't suppose it would be difficu't for him to get a wife here, if he is in search of one. Though

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he may have no such idea, he must be used to being a bachelor by this time."

Kate Hartigan pondered. "I wish he'd come and live in Groudle," she declared, "and let me keep house for him. I could do it just as well as any sighted person——".

She broke off. Someone had stopped at the cottage gate. But her quick ear warned her that it was not the footstep for which she had been listening, and she waited for either Moira or the new arrival to speak.

Moira herself had glanced up. A youthful, stalwart groom, in a dark brown livery, with mauve facings, had halted at the wooden wicket.

"This—this is Mr. Davenal's place, isn't it?" he asked. "Mr. Davenal, the diver? Can I see him a moment?"

"This is Mr. Davenal's," said Moira, opening the gate; "but he is out at present, working over by the breakwater on a wreck."

She blushed a little, though there was no apparent call for it.

"On Sir Guy Vanbrugh's yacht," she added, "that was sunk there. But he will be back soon—for the tide is rising, and they can only work between the tides. Can I give him a message? Or perhaps you would like to wait, he may be in any moment."

The groom shook his head, and, with a glance at the blind girl, beckoned Moira aside. She stepped out of the gate a trifle puzzled.

"I'm from Groudle Tower," she was told, and the speaker lowered his voice; "Mr. Davenal has a sister who is maid to Lady Tarleton,"

"I believe so," said Moira; "my aunt Hannah. I have never seen her."

The other took off his hat and peered into it with an air of sympathetic embarrassment. "Nor ever will now," he replied; "leastways alive. There's been a sad business up at the Tower, and Miss Davenal—who was here unexpectedly with my lady—is dead. Killed, they say, that is—murdered!"

"I'm innocent of her death, and I'm here to prove it. I want one word—one single word—alone with her ladyship."

Moira recoiled, and the groom put on his hat again. "Mr. Davenal might care to come up to the Tower," he continued. "I must get back to the police-station round the corner, I was sent down in the dog-cart for a constable, and they're telephoning to consult the superintendent. I just slipped across meanwhile, thinking it was only right to let you know; there was talk up at the Tower, in the servants' hall, of Mr. Davenal being her only relation."

He scrutimised her with a sudden masculine interest, noticing her limpid grey eyes, her elastic figure, and the masses of golden-yellow hair that made a halo to her clear-cut features. Moira felt his scrutiny, and it annoyed her vaguely.

"I will see that father knows of it at once," she said curtly, and went in at the wicket, leaving the groom to make a somewhat lingering retreat. The blind girl was awaiting her; there was a look of pathetic alarm in Kate Hartigan's sightless orbs.

"What is the matter, Mollie?" she inquired tremulously. "Not—not anything wrong with Mr. Davenal? I fancied I heard his name."

Moira started. "No, dear," she said; "oh, I'm so sorry you thought it might be that! It was a groom from Groudle Tower to say that—that father's sister Hannah is dead. She was maid to Lady Tarleton. I don't believe father and she were friends—I have never seen her here. But the people at the Tower want father to be told; I suppose I had better run down to the breakwater and meet him. Then he can go straight up to the Tower."

She hastened into the cottage, to emerge with her hat on and a flapping cape thrown loosely on her shoulders.

The blind girl drew the gate wide for her, and Moira went down across the quay, fighting with the keen seabreeze to keep her cape from being blown over her head. The wind increased as she pressed forward along the edge of the harbour to gain the granite breakwater that ran out into the bay. The water on the seaward side of the breakwater was smooth with a sticky smoothness; the wind was in an unusual quarter.

At a point some twenty yards short of its extremity, and ten from its seaward edge, a stout vessel of the "smack" type lay off the breakwater, to which it was moored, lifting to the wash of the great eddy. A species of ladder descended into the water from the gunwale of the smack and the strong rope, electric-light wire, and substantial air-hose of a diver's equipment came out of the lapping wavelets at the vessel's counter. In the "waist" of the smack a man was turning steadily the handle of the air-pump that was connected with the hose. Another, and yet another man was busy with the rope.

Close to the smack was a squat, big-beamed steam-vessel, a wisp of smoke trailing from her dingy funnel. From her low hull there floated the monotonous jarring throb of powerful pumps. A foaming cataract of water over her side showed the task upon which she was engaged. A thick pipe of wire and rubber passed through a sling to plunge into the depths between the vessels.

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Even while Moira paused to watch, the huge helmet of the diver rose out of the water at the smack's side, the sunlight glittering on its triple lenses and brass fittings. The men in her unhooked the leaden breast and back plates, helped the diver into the craft and unscrewed the great metal headpiece. The grave, flushed face and close-cropped head of John Davenal appeared.

His assistants relieved him of his heavy boots and he stepped into the after-part of the smack. Moira seated herself on a battered wooden bench near a flight of landing-stairs, and waited. Presently the small dinghy at the smack's stern was hauled round to her counter, and John Davenal, clad in his ordinary garments, got into it. One of his assistants followed, took up the sculls, and the dinghy shot towards the granite stairs. Moira got up and began to descend them.

The tide, though rising, was still low, and there were three long tiers of stairs. The dinghy reached the landing-platform as soon as she did. John Davenal was sitting in the stern-sheets, his head in his palms, allowing the rower to steer the boat with the sculls. As the dinghy touched the granite ledge he stepped out. Then, and not till then, did he see her. His face lit with a faint smile and he took her hands.

"Eh, Moira lass," he said, "so you wanted an airing and came to meet me. Well, you're a rare sight for a man to set eyes on who's been down under water for a couple of hours. But the job's practically done now and the pump's running free. The yacht's light, and lifting from the bottom like a cork."

A breath of relief stole through Moira's lips. "That is good, dad dear," she said; "then you won't have to go down any more."

"No," answered the diver slowly, "not again—bar accidents. Are you very glad, my lass?"

Moira sighed. "Oh, so glad," she answered, and put her arm through his.

The diver paused to give some instructions to his assistant, and then moved heavily up the landing-stairs. He had laid his great hand on Moira's and fondled it.

"You've been a lot to me all these years, Moira," he said hoarsely. "Down under the black water many and many a time when I felt as if I couldn't hold to my job any longer, I've remembered my little Moira, waiting at home for her old dad, and the thought of your golden locks was like a glint of sunshine in the dark and the cold. And I've gone on because being the best diver in England meant the best work and the biggest prices, and hastened the day when I could make my last dive. I've always been promising myself, you know, to settle down at home and build that new greenhouse we've talked about, or smoke my pipe by the fire and watch you come and go."

John Davenal's voice was trembling, and his big frame shook. He almost reeled as they gained the top of the breakwater and went along it. Moira hesitated to tell him her evil news.

"Poor dad!" she murmured soothingly, "you are so cold and tired. You shouldn't have gone out this morning so soon. You didn't have any breakfast."

The diver shook his head. "Better not," he said. "I wanted to go down at once. The tide served and the wind was in the right quarter."

Moira clasped his arm lovingly. "I'm glad it's finished, dad," she declared. "Don't go down any more, will you, for my sake, dad?"

John Davenal's broad chest heaved. "You—you wouldn't like the idea of leaving me, would you, Moira?" he queried huskily.

"Oh, dad!" began Moira, and checked herself. Had not Guy Vanbrugh asked her to be his wife! The diver did not notice the incompleteness of the sentence.

"I—I thought not," he answered, "I—I hoped not."

Moira wondered at his agitation and at the singular emotion that unsteadied his usually strong, deliberate tone. But she remembered her unfulfilled mission.

"Dad," she said shrinkingly, "I didn't come down only to meet you. I—I had a message for you—some news; not—not very good news."

The diver looked at her with a certain anxiety. "You're here and well, Moira," he responded, "and I won't rebel at aught else. What is it—not—not poor Kit—no accident?"

"No," Moira told him, "not to Kit. But a man, a groom, called from Groudle Tower to say that Aunt Hannah—it was Aunt Hannah who was maid to Lady Tarleton, wasn't it?—was dead. The man said—murdered."

John Davenal put a hand to his throat, he seemed to be struggling for breath. "Dead!" he faltered. "Hannah dead! Hannah—murdered!"

He stood still, swaying like a reed. His eyelids had drooped and his face grown suddenly florid. He leant heavily on Moira's shoulder; she strove in vain to steady his great bulk. The next moment she was supporting his head as he lay on the wind-blown granite of the breakwater. Big and powerful man as he was, he had fainted.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

Detective-Sergeant Ussher.

"No, I have absolutely no knowledge of anything that might have led to this extraordinary occurrence. Davenal was a most sober, respectable person. She had been my personal attendant from girlhood, and I should have thought it impossible that she had a single enemy in the world."

"Popular with the other servants, my lady?"

The question was put with a military abruptness. But there was a dry, deferential suggestiveness in the inquiry—a kind of confidential semi-secrecy that made the speaker's voice quite unlike the ringing, precise tones of the soldier. A projecting chin, blue with a closely-shaven beard, and marked with a deep, irregular dimple under the lower lip, a bushy, blunt-ended moustache sprinkled with grey, a long straight nose, and slowly-moving "bilious" eyes; these, with the addition of a loose, broadcloth suit, heavy boots, a stiff felt hat, and an open notebook completed his personality.

Lady Tarleton sank into a faded tapestry lounge in one of the great bare reception-rooms of Groudle Tower, and looked at the card in her fingers. It was marked:

Detective-Sergeant Ussher,
Criminal Investigation Department,
New Scotland Yard.

"I'm sure I can't say, Mr.—Mr. Ussher," she answered, a little haughtily; "I do not seek to penetrate the social mysteries of the servants' hall."

Mr. Ussher laid his hat, with a muttered apology, on a neighbouring chair, and jotted down a line or two in his notebook.

"In any case," added Lady Tarleton, "Davenal only came up to Groudle from town with me some thirty-six hours since. And she has never had much connection with the small household which is kept here to maintain the place in order."

Her interviewer rubbed his chin with his pencil, reflectively.

"Has your ladyship noticed recently any change in the demeanour of the deceased?" he asked; "any suggestion of mental worry—or anxiety?"

"None whatever," he was told; "even so late as last night her conduct and bearing were perfectly normal. I had spoken of returning to town to-day. She was to look out the first good train and make arrangements accordingly. I learn from the butler that she did so before retiring."

"Your ladyship's groom," said Mr. Ussher softly, "informed me during our drive here that the deceased was a native of Groudle and has relatives in the locality. Was she on good terms with her family?"

Lady Tarleton sighed impatiently. "I'm sure I cannot even venture an opinion, Mr.—Mr. Ussher," she retorted. "Naturally, I do not discuss with the servants either their own or my private affairs."

She had glanced at the card again to remind herself, with aristocratic languor, of his name.

"I see you are from Scotland Yard," she said; "are you temporarily attached to Groudle?"

Mr. Ussher put away his pencil and notebook.

"Not quite, my lady," he answered; "I have been engaged in a case with local ramifications, and being on the spot, the superintendent suggested my making—as rather an experienced hand, my lady—the preliminary inquiries into this unfortunate affair."

Lady Tarleton looked at him through a lorgnette that hung at her bosom.

"You are quite an expert, then," she observed; "how interesting! Well, I'm not vindictive, Mr. Ussher, but I have lost an excellent servant, and in a truly shocking fashion. I trust you will have no difficulty in bringing the criminal—or criminals—to justice. Pray give the superintendent my compliments, and say that I appreciate his thoughtfulness in intrusting the matter to a competent man like yourself."

The detective bowed.

"I am obliged to your ladyship," he said; "we shall, of course, endeavour to spare your ladyship as much as possible in connection with such public proceedings as may be necessary."

He took up his hat and retreated to the door. On the threshold he bowed again and stepped out into the hall. With a noiseless yet stolid stride, he crossed it, let himself out, and went down the avenue by which Groudle Tower was approached. His small hazel eyes, set in yellowish "whites," were fixed upon the ground, his head bent a trifle forward. Thus meditating, he gained the high-road and turned in the direction of the town. When he passed a chance wayfarer, his gaze lifted—and fell. He never looked at anyone twice, or for more than a fraction of a minute.

Paying no attention to the buffetings of the wind, he made his way through the cold, bright Spring weather into Groudle. He had chosen a roundabout route that brought him in at an extremity of the straggling sea-port. Noon was past, and the activity of the town was subdued by the quiet of the dinner hour. Mr. Ussher stalked thoughtfully along the main street, diving now and then into side thoroughfares until he had passed in review almost every shop in Groudle. Whenever he came to that of a chemist, and there were not more than three in all, he entered it, showed his official card, held a subdued colloquy with the tenant, and consulted a volume produced by the latter.

After emerging from one of these brief interviews—it was the last of his three calls—he passed onward for some half-dozen yards and then halted, to take out his note-book and write a name, that of the chemist he had just left. Under it he wrote a memorandum, "Sixpennyworth of chloroform, 20th March." He added another name and address, writing them with much deliberation, "Dennis Hartigan, Hawthorn Cottage, Groudle Quay."

This done, he turned his footsteps towards the waterside, and inspected methodically the buildings in its neighbourhood. A green-painted wicket caught his surreptitiously roving glance—a wicket inscribed in bold lettering, "Hawthorn Cottage—John Davenal."

Mr. Ussher went by it without faltering, to halt at a discreet distance, extract his note-book, and turn up a page. He had a memorandum on the sheet, "John Davenal, diver, of Groudle Quay—bro. of decd."

"Go slow, Tom Ussher!" he muttered, "Go slow! Is this a clue, or is it a booby-trap? John Davenal, brother of the deceased Hannah Davenal, who was chloroformed and suffocated. Chloroform bought yesterday by someone from J.D.'s address. Humph!"

He took a piece of dry, hard biscuit out of his pocket, broke it up and stood nibbling it. "Hartigan," he said, "who—is—Hartigan?"

Mr. Ussher reflected absorbedly for some moments, then threw away his biscuit, and, with an air of decision, went back to the diver's cottage, entered the wicket, and going through the neat garden, knocked at the door.

Moira answered the summons. The caller stepped in quickly.

"I want to see Mr. Davenal," he intimated; "I—I am from Groudle Tower."

Moira grew white.

"Oh, please," she said, "can't you leave it till another time? Father got such a shock this morning when he heard. We thought he was never going to come round. The doctor has only just gone. He says father must be kept very, very quiet. You see, father is a diver, and it is a strain on his heart—he had only just come up after two hours in five fathoms. Won't you call again, or tell me what it is?"

Mr. Ussher pondered.

"I think I had better call again, my dear," he replied paternally. "But can't I see Mr.—Mr. Hartigan now? He lives here, doesn't he?"

Moira answered in the negative, rather surprised.

"Oh, no," she said, "he's no relation to us, only to Kit, who lives with us! She is blind, you know, and Mr. Hartigan's sister."

"Dear me!" commented Mr. Ussher craftily. "I suppose that accounts for the mistake. I believe I used to be acquainted with Mr. Hartigan, though. Where is he living at present?"

"I think," said Moira doubtfully, "at the 'Half Brick,' on the Groudle Road. It's an old-fashioned public-house. But he's only just got home from sea!"

Mr. Ussher nodded. "Let me see," he murmured, "a week ago, wasn't it? A week or so yesterday—March the—twentieth—Wednesday, it was. I fancied I saw him. 'Dear me,' I said, 'that must be my old friend Dennis!'"

"Yes, it must have been," agreed Moira. "It was Wednesday that he first came to see us. He may call here at any time, though. Can I tell him your name?"

"N—no, thank you," responded

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Edward Stormont

Mr. Ussher, "it doesn't matter. Well, I hope your father will soon be better. Good-day."

And he went out of Hawthorn Cottage, carefully shutting the door after him.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"Welcome to Groudle Tower."

"Get us a conveyance of some sort, porter, and help my man with the bag."

The functionary thus instructed was standing on the platform of the small local station, contemplating, with an air of detached interest, the departure of the early evening express. He glanced quickly at the person who had spoken, and with a startled "Yes, sir!" hastened off. His gait showed that he was both elderly and rheumatic. The station-master had just signalled the train off. As he turned towards his office the hurrying porter ran against him.

"Dear me, sir," exclaimed the offender, "I beg your pardon! But would you believe it, sir, Mr. Stormont's back. He came on the express just now."

The station-master, a hale and grizzled veteran of the line, started. "Mr. Stormont!" he ejaculated. "Not Mr. Edward Stormont—Mr. Stormont of the Tower?"

"Yes, sir," said the porter, "and rare and grey he has got, to be sure. But I knew him at once!"

His superior strode down the platform. A couple of men in travelling suits and tweed caps were strolling to and fro near the exit gates of the station. One was tall and broad-shouldered, with a cropped iron-grey beard and powerful, weighty frame, the other shorter, slighter and younger, with a nut-brown complexion, a small, fair moustache, and humorous, good-tempered eyes. His bearing was suggestive of military associations, and yet his expression was not that of the trained disciplinarian—it was too thoughtful, too reflective. The station-master touched his cap, and addressed the taller.

"Glad to see you home again, Mr. Stormont," he said deferentially, "it's a long time since Groudle had a sight of you."

The other smiled a grave, melancholy smile. "Or I of Groudle," he replied. "Well, we must try to remedy that. I'm a little tired of running about the world, and London was never a favourite abiding-place of mine. I fancy in future I shall spend a few months of each year at the Tower. By the way, I suppose no one is there now?"

The station-master looked serious. "Yes, sir," he responded. "Her ladyship came down only the day before yesterday. And this morning, to tell the truth, sir, they do say that something very strange has happened up at the Tower. Her ladyship's maid, sir; there is word of an accident—or—or worse. Some say foul play, but I should hope that's not true. Have you any luggage, sir? I didn't notice any carriage from the Tower."

"No," he was answered, "they don't know I am coming. There are only a few bags, your porter is helping my valet with them, I think. You might hurry them up."

"Certainly sir," rejoined the stationmaster, and went off, taking his dismissal a little reluctantly. The elder man turned to the younger.

"Jerome," he said, "there seems to be a fatality about my visits to Groudle. I have been here three times in twenty years, and each time there has been a death. My wife, my child, and now—some servant or other must needs keep up the depressing coincidence. Well, at all events, we shall not find the Tower empty, my sister-in-law is there."

He moved to the entrance-gate, his valet was showing the collector the tickets, a couple of "flys" had drawn up outside, the porter and a flyman were piling a half-dozen portmanteaux and kit-bags, supplemented by a brace of gun-cases, into the rear vehicle. The hotel and train labels on them were those of every big city and line in Europe, and not a few in Asia and America.

Their owners got into the first of the "flys," the station-master closed the door and lifted his cap. The vehicles drove off. The sun was sinking across the bay as they climbed the hill out of the town, and the evening breeze blew chill.

"A pretty place, Jerome," observed Edward Stormont, "and yet it has more sad than sweet associations for me." He pointed to the black silhouette of the Tower conspicuous against the sky.

"There," he added, "I spent my honeymoon, there my wife died, there my baby daughter drooped and faded. It is a landmark of sweet and bitter memories."

He relapsed into silence. His companion sat back in the creaking vehicle, and marked, with a shrewd, interested gaze, the sights and sounds about him. At last the "flys" drove into the shadowy courtyard of Groudle Tower, and Edward Stormont sprang out.

"Welcome to Groudle Tower!" he said. The valet had descended from the second vehicle and gone to knock at the massive entrance-door. It opened after a brief delay, and Edward Stormont, motioning to his companion to precede him, walked in. He stopped abruptly.

The heavy gas-brackets in the hall of the great house were lighted and their yellow radiance fell upon a singular group. A couple of uniformed policemen were guarding a handcuffed prisoner—a short, thick-set man, with tanned and bloated features. Near him stood a stolid personage trifling with a notebook and pencil. And, facing these four, her head thrown back haughtily, her jewelled fingers catching restlessly at a lace handkerchief, was a well-dressed, grey-haired woman. It was Lady Tarleton.

As Edward Stormont paused in the doorway of the hall, she glanced up and saw him. The handcuffed prisoner was speaking defiantly.

"I'm Dennis Hartigan all right," he said, "and Hannah Davenal's husband all right. But I'm innocent of her death, and I'm here to prove it. I want one word—one single word—alone with her ladyship."

(The conversation between Lady Tarleton and Hartigan will be given next Tuesday.)

Jack: "Her heart is as hard as glass. I've little hope of making an impression on it." His Sister: "Try a diamond."

Tom: "The management seem to have spared no expense for the production of this play." Kitty: "No, indeed; they have given each chorus girl at least three coats of paint."

"Dear girl!" he said rapturously. "If it is just the same to you, George, I would prefer not to have you use that adjective," she returned. "Why not?" he demanded. "It reminds me too much of what papa sometimes says to me."

Mrs. Smarte says her husband is the worst man that ever was to go shopping. He's almost sure to get swindled. "Why," she says, "it was only t'other day that he bought a flute, and when it came home, if you'll believe me, it was full of holes."

Magistrate (to women charged with drunkenness): "You must pay 5s. each." Prisoner: "Sure, then, I've but 2s., and my companion 1s. in the world." Magistrate: "Then you must go to prison. If you hadn't got intoxicated with your money you'd have enough to pay the fine."

"Young man," said the prosperous old gentleman, "you say you haven't had a good meal for a week?" "I have not, sir." "And you've seen better days?" "I have." "Used to move in good society?" "Yes, sir." "Then come along with me to a first class restaurant, and I'll pay for some quail on toast. I want to learn the correct way to eat the blessed dish."

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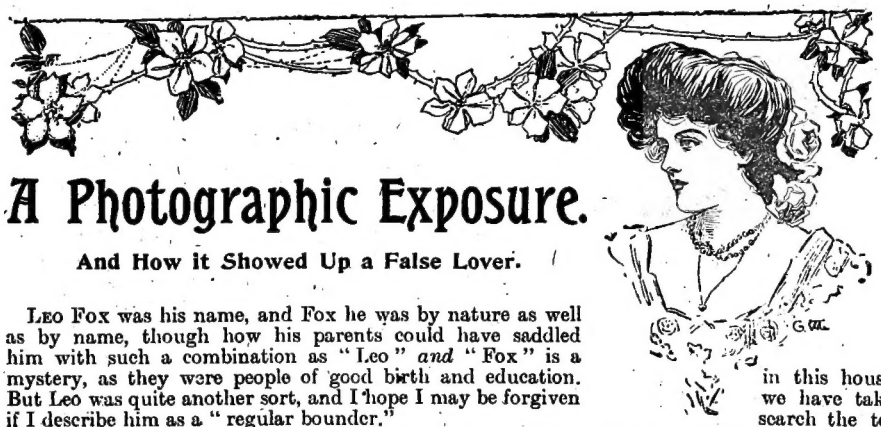

A Photographic Exposure.

And How it Showed Up a False Lover.

Leo Fox was his name, and Fox he was by nature as well as by name, though how his parents could have saddled him with such a combination as "Leo" *and* "Fox" is a mystery, as they were people of good birth and education. But Leo was quite another sort, and I hope I may be forgiven if I describe him as a "regular bounder."

The characteristics of this species are pretty generally known, so I need not enlarge on them, but curiously enough there was in this young man also a vein of pure cunning; he thoroughly enjoyed deceit for its own sake, and was never so happy as when playing a double part.

You will say that I have given myself away now, and that I must have some reason for taking away another man's character.

For the best of reasons I could not do that—he simply had no character, but I admit I had good cause both to dislike him and for my poor opinion of him.

Leo Fox was engaged to Miss Angel—or, to be more correct, Miss Angela Devine—and cad as he was, I have heard him give as a toast, "The divine Angel!"

Miss Angel, as I always called her, was the only daughter of old Devine, a rich country banker, well known for his philanthropic work and temperance leanings—I had nearly said fads—but in spite of these little drawbacks he was a most charming old gentleman in all but one respect, and that was that he could not be brought to see the real character of the man to whom he had promised his beautiful daughter.

Leo's parents died when he was about fifteen. The whole of their fortune having been swept away by the failure of an investment for which Mr. Devine was responsible, he thought to make amends by adopting the lad, and in time making all fair and square by a marriage between his ward and his only daughter.

Leo was certainly as fond of Miss Angel as it was possible for him to be of anyone, and she had always looked upon him as "just Leo," and criticised him no more than we usually do those with whom we have been brought up. But after the engagement there came a change.

Perhaps I had something to do with it.

I had a considerable reputation as one of the coming men at the School of Art in the neighbouring town of Hampton, and having introductions to old Mr. Devine, I became installed as drawing-master-in-ordinary to his daughter.

My modest income was, however, by no means to my taste, and I determined to try for press work. Very soon I cut the School of Art altogether, but went over to Little Hampton village regularly to instruct my best pupil, for she had a clever turn for caricature and one day I came upon a collection of drawings in which her acquaintances figured.

There was a capital sketch of me as "Brer Rabbit," which I did not in the least resent, and Leo was "Brer Fox," and you will remember that "Brer Fox" always got the worst of it. It was a good omen.

"Miss Angel," I said boldly, "you have hit upon the truth; it *is* a fight between Leo Fox and myself, and I intend to win."

"To win!" she echoed, turning first red, then pale. "Win what, Mr. Rutherford?"

"You," I answered bluntly. "You, Angel. Leo Fox is not the man for you, and you shall never marry him if I can prevent it. I may not succeed in winning your love, and Heaven knows I am not worthy of it either, but at least I will save you from marrying a gambler and card-sharper who would break your heart before a year was out!"

"Do you not think," she interrupted, rising to her feet and looking down on me full of anger, "it would be well to defer these accusations till you can make them to Leo's face, instead of slandering him behind his back? Where are your proofs?

"We have known Leo all our lives, his character is safe in this house. But you, Mr. Rutherford, we have taken on trust. Are we now to search the town for testimonials to your honour, truthfulness and disinterestedness?" She turned from me and swept to the door.

"Stop!" I said, "you have given me a hearing, but only a partial one, you must hear me out. Leo may have a character in this house, but I'm hanged if he has anywhere else! Go and ask in the town if you like—let Mr. Devine ask what goes on at the 'Royal' five nights out of six.

"Proofs! Yes I have them and I mean to use them. But that is not all. You became engaged to Leo Fox to please your father. You do not love him—I guessed it before. Now"—putting my hand on the caricatures—"I am certain of it.

"Listen, Angel! You are not happy, if you were I would not speak yet. But I am going away. I cannot stand seeing that cad always with you. I have got work elsewhere, and I mean to get on. Then I shall come back and get my answer. I have loved you since you were a fifteen-year-old pickle, and I love you more than ever now you are in danger of making a ghastly mistake."

She smiled scornfully.

"Yes, Angel, in real danger; speak to your father use your eyes, your ears, you cannot, must not, marry this man."

* * * * *

I heard nothing of or from the Devines' for some months, and I settled down to my new work in London feeling a little sore that I could be so completely forgotten. And then I found that my memory was still kept green but not in quite the way I should have chosen.

Mr. Devine wrote that "he had made the inquiries I so disinterestedly had demanded, and that he was more than ever satisfied of the excellent character of his future son-in-law."

I felt the snub. Only the heroes of fiction are above snubs, but I still meant to win. Angel was not to be married till the following spring, when she came of age, and Fox might give himself away long before that date arrived.

My chance came sooner than I had expected.

Derby Day! Blazing sun, clouds of dust over everything, and a moving sea of people! What a scene! And how could any man convey any real notion of it on one small canvas. I stood chatting to a chum who had come down with me.

"Come and sketch old Greenwood," he said.

The old book-maker was at his stand and the usual types of the betting-man were round him.

Women were there too, and one gaudily dressed specimen of her class had her hand on the shoulder of a man who was entering a bet in his book. He looked up and our eyes met.

It was Leo Fox.

He tossed his hat on to the back of his head, tipped me an impudent wink, and went off with his companion.

"Nice subjects," said the pressman. "I've put 'em in—seen *him* before; goes the pace a bit too! Surely not a chum of yours, Rutherford?"

"He's a beast," I answered, "an unmitigated beast!"

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How I wished Mr. Devine could have seen him! I would not give much for Leo's chance of marrying Angel after; the old man thought "the devil and all his works" were met with on a race-ground sooner than anywhere else. But he'd never know anything of Fox's ways, and was as likely to turn up at the Derby as I was to preside at one of his prayer meetings.

Nothing further happened till September, when I was down at Brighton. I was sketching the remains of the old chain pier when a lady passed me. I turned sharply and she started. It was Miss Angel. The strong wind had given her a touch of colour, but I could see how thin and changed she was.

"How glad I am to meet you," she began hurriedly. "Oh! Mr. Rutherford——"

She stopped as suddenly as she had begun. I took her hand and drew her away out of the wind.

"Sit down," I said. "What is it?"

"Help me, do help me, there is no one else, and—and I am frightened," she answered almost in a whisper.

"No one half so ready or able," I said. "Tell me. Is it Leo?"

She nodded, half-shuddering.

"Yes, Leo—I can't do it—I thought I could, but since you spoke to me I am afraid, and I can't marry him."

"Speak to your father, or to Leo," I urged. "They both love you in their own way—as for me, I am not disinterested, you know."

She turned her head away, but her eyes filled with tears, and I felt like a brute; after all she had come to me for help.

"Break it off," I repeated, "what is to hinder? You don't love him."

"Leo wants the money—he lost his through father, and——"

"And you are to be the compensation. I for one don't see it. Let him take the money, but break it off. Make them listen to you."

"I can't; I have tried."

"You can refuse to marry him, can't you, what is easier?"

"Yes. No. I can't; I mean I would do it, only—only they would think I have some other reason, and I can't speak because——"

"Well?"

No answer.

"Well, just because," I asked, bending over her.

"Just because I do care," she whispered.

The dusk of the autumn afternoon closed in about us and we were alone together.

* * * * *

When I left Angel, it was settled that I was to go down to Little Hampton at Christmas.

Between now and then I was to devise some plan which would convince Mr. Devine of Leo's unsuitability as his son-in-law, and free Angel without my name being dragged into the matter. A nice task she had set me, yet it was the condition of my winning her, and unnecessary and quixotic as it seemed to me, I would fulfil it. For Angel, the darling, was firm; she would not come to me empty-handed, and Mr. Devine was quite capable of cutting her off with a shilling if she broke off the match on her own initiative.

The next thing I heard was that the marriage was being hastened on and was to take place at Christmas. Leo evidently suspected something, and had no intention of losing the cash. My poor little girl! I was getting desperate, barely a month to work in. Then one day in Regent Street a sudden idea struck me and I made my plans.

* * *

Everything was in train. I flattered myself that I was about to make it hot for "Brer Fox." I got off by the twentieth and went down to the village with Lee, my friend of the press.

There was little to amuse him except our grand annual entertainment, a sort of glorified tea-meeting, to which all the old people, the Temperance Society, Bands of Hope, and all Mr. Devine's friends who approved of philanthropic fads, were invited.

The village and the "Quality" made merry together, and the show included niggers, carols, recitations, the village choir, and, as a great and crowning finish, Animated Pictures.

Nervous old ladies predicted a second Paris fire; as for me, I shouldn't have minded a little flare up, which would enable me to rescue Angel while Leo ran away. But it might have been awkward if Leo rescued her instead, so on the whole I thought we would skip the fire.

The great evening came at last. Of course Lee and I were in the reserved seats, and I took care to sit just behind Mr. Devine and his party, but as we came in late while the gas was low, the old man had not the slightest idea that we were there.

Wild bursts of applause greeted the living pictures—a perfect hurricane of bravos, with stamping and clapping showed their appreciation of Jubilee Day.

"An' I shouldn't wonner," said a queer old biddy behind me, "if there worn't nobody so glad when it were all over, as pore ole Victoria 'erself!"

We were getting towards the end of the show now, and I held my breath as I waited. I furtively watched Leo Fox. He could not see me save by turning right round in his seat. He was between Mr. Devine and Angel, and he took advantage of the excitement to steal his arm round her waist and whisper in her ear. Of course it was pretty nearly dark, but I saw him, and saw also the shudder with which she drew herself away from him.

Brute that he was! How many other girls had he embraced in similar fashion. I could scarcely keep from hauling him out of his seat by main force. Then Lee chuckled in my ear.

"Time's up!" he said, with a sardonic grin, as he pointed to the screen.

The Derby Race-course was now to be seen. A horrified murmur broke from Mr. Devine; he had not bargained to be present at a Derby, but he could not help himself, it was too late to stop the show.

All at once the Squire, who was sitting on the other side of Angel, exclaimed in a loud voice:

"By Jove! There's Leo Fox!"

"Where? What? Bless my soul—so it is! To the very life!" stuttered the Vicar, as he nudged Mr. Devine. "I say, Devine, I never thought Leo——" He stopped short, remembering Angel.

"Cries of "Oh! I say, look at Mr. Fox!" "Who's the lady?" "I say, he's stuck fast." "Well, I never! Who would have thought it of Mr. Fox?" rang through the room.

One of the pictures had caught for a moment, and a corner of the race-course stood out distinctly; in the foreground was old Greenwood on his stand speaking to a man in a loud check suit. A woman at his side threw her arm over his shoulder. He was just entering a bet; as the obstacle was removed and the pictures glided on across the screen, he tipped his hat to the back of his head, winked to someone out of sight, and vanished.

The final scene where the crowd swarms over the course, flashed by as the murmurs of surprise went round the audience and the lights turned up with a glare, showed to all Angel's white face and Mr. Devine's look of fury.

It was a photographic exposure, and we had every reason to be gratified with the result.

On Christmas Day, Mr. Devine and Lee sat smoking together, and Angel and I were alone by the fire, she vowing that she *never, never* would be such a coward again; and I assuring her with equal emphasis, that she *never, never* would have the chance again.

N. Murrell Marris.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

LADY HONORIA. Sister of the Duke of Eastacres.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. An eminent French artist in love with Belinda.

CRAWLEY DAVENANT. An old friend of Lady Peggy.

We Stop at Monte Carlo.

THE next day Belinda came to me in great distress about the loss of the medal. She explained that it had to her, a sentimental value, that she would take any trouble, go to any expense to secure its return.

"It may have fallen on the floor of the carriage," she said. "Lady Peggy, may we not drive back to Florence so that I can search for it?"

Her appeal convinced me that whoever had abstracted the coin from my jewel-case, it was not Belinda. I consented to the proposed search, and took advantage of her absence with Honoria to thoroughly overhaul the latter's luggage—Mark had forwarded his wife's wardrobe before we left Florence.

I guessed beforehand that my investigation would be fruitless; not for an instant was it possible to credit Honoria with sufficient ingenuity to have entered my room and abstracted the keys without my knowledge. All the same I thought it better to make assurance doubly sure, and, as I say, I turned out her ladyship's belongings, but to no effect.

Next, I directed my attention to the innkeeper and his household. Here I met with no better success. Mine host was an elderly man of immense girth, who could not go upstairs by reason of his corpulence. His mother, an aged crone, and two peasant women, formed the staff of the establishment. It was idle to imagine that any one of them could have taken the coin.

I had to leave the problem unsolved. It was a long time before I discovered the whereabouts of the bronze token. I paid dearly for the knowledge.

We journeyed but slowly through Italy. Belinda's health was flagging, and she could not stand prolonged fatigue. We arrived at Nice the end of October, putting up at an exquisite little villa which Madame D'Astrea had placed at our disposal.

Belinda cared but little for the town, she was inspired with a love for the blue waters of the Mediterranean, however, and spent all her time upon the water.

The young Earl of Carmegan, who, with his mother, was staying at Monte Carlo, placed his yacht at our disposal. Often of a night—one of those exquisite southern nights when the air, laden with a thousand perfumes, fans the cheek like a caress, when the sky of wonderful clearness is jewelled with stars—we would sit on deck watching the lights of Nice in the distance.

The town appeared in the form of a string of lights, and in the middle of this string the building called Gêtée Promenade, shone like a gigantic lantern. As we came nearer each of the lights changed into a fiery pillar shivering on the moving line of the shore.

Sometimes, with gradually increasing motion, we shot past luxurious private yachts, fitted with all the ease and elegance of a bijou residence in Mayfair; past ironclads, whose enormous bodies were outlined harshly on the opalescent sky.

The deck of H.M.S. *Conqueror*, decorated with multi-coloured lanterns, and wreaths of roses stretched from slim Venetian poles, shone in the distance.

The officers were giving a ball, the band was playing, the sound of soft music and gay laughter came over the water. Nice is the paradise of the yachtsman, there he will meet vessels, world-famous for their speed, the elegance of their build, the luxury of their fittings.

Nice is no longer a favourite with the best people in Society. The consumptives have invaded the place and cast a gloom that even the bright sunshine cannot wholly dispel. The British colony is made up of the great middle-class, with a sprinkling of third-rate titles, who eke out a wretched income by introducing *parvenues* into what they term Society!

The first week in November we arrived at Monte Carlo. We drove from Nice by the road called Old Corniche, which stretches along the rocky shore.

The view is wonderful; to the right one looks upon the blue depths of the Mediterranean, sparkling like an immense turquoise in the sun. The roofs of the villas scattered along the shore, peep through thickets of eucalyptus, masses of almond blossom, and green and leafy palms.

Huge bushes of heliotrope scent everything with an exquisite fragrance, the fragrance of the orange blossom is in the air, and the sun—the glorious southern sun—is above all.

And this in a month when the good people of London are smothered with fog, and mud, and misery. You may shake your head at us, my dear middle-class matron, but confess you envy us in November.

We stayed at the Hotel de Paris. The *chef* there is devoted to me. Ever since I paid him a special compliment upon his stewed ortolans—they really are divine—he has looked forward to my yearly visit with the pleasure a great artist feels for appreciative admiration. The hotel is like most others. Fashionable hotels differ very little—they are all well appointed, perfectly managed, and frightfully dear!

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The chief employment or recreation at the charming little principality, is, as you know, gambling. Other amusements are pigeon-shooting, music—the orchestra at the Casino is world-famous—and the theatre. At a pigeon-shooting match Belinda made herself horribly conspicuous.

Why on earth those persons who eat and enjoy pigeon-pie should worry themselves, and other people, over the way in which the succulent birds are dispatched, I can't think. It seems to me that one half of the world is always annoying the other half with absurd theories. Actually I believe there is a Society for the Protection of Pigeons! Can anything be more ridiculous?

In accordance with my plan, Eastacres arrived at Monte Carlo shortly after us. I cautioned him to keep out of sight for the present as it would not do to give Belinda the least cause for apprehension. He obeyed my instructions, and neither Belinda nor Honoria had a suspicion he was there.

One afternoon, however, we sauntered down to the lawn, a large expanse of smooth, green grass running out towards the sea, where the shooting takes place. The cages with the pigeons are disposed on it in a half circle. Each moment one of them opens suddenly, and the frightened bird flies out; then the shot resounds and the pigeon falls either on the grass or into the sea, where on the waves small boats with fishermen wait expectantly for the prey.

Often it happens that the pigeon is missed, then it flies towards the sea, and, making a circle, returns, seeking shelter on the roof of the Casino.

Immense sums are won and lost over pigeon-shooting. I have seen a man miss one, two, three birds, and known that his lack of luck or skill meant the gain of twenty thousand pounds, to a stripling, fresh from Eton, who bagged his bird every time.

Pigeon-shooting certainly does not call forth what old-fashioned people name sportsmanlike behaviour. Men will turn white with rage and mortification and savagely blaze away at a wretched bird which, with broken wing, vainly tries to escape.

All the world goes to the pigeon-shooting at Monte Carlo. Great ladies, wives of the well-to-do tradespeople, and ballet girls jostle each other in rivalry for a good place. Lady Saxby insisted on entering for a match; she mauled her birds horribly but never missed a shot.

When we arrived on the ground she was finishing a match with the Hon. Ian McAlister. He had scored eighteen out of a possible twenty; her record at the moment we came upon the scene was just sixteen.

A bird flew high up over our heads. Ping—the shot flew home, the creature dropped, fluttering in agony. Another bird was loosed, and with the same result. Lady Saxby looked triumphant. Her next shot missed, however, the bird flew off unharmed. The next and last shot would decide the match. If she winged the pigeon she would win the stakes of five hundred pounds, if not the match would be a draw.

The cage was opened, Lady Saxby took aim, but the pigeon, as if dazed, remained on the spot. They tried to force the bird to fly by rolling balls upon the grass, whistling and screaming at it. The creature was panic-stricken, however, and cowered closer to the ground.

Lady Saxby called impatiently for another bird to be let loose. McAlister negatived the proposition, and declared she must shoot that one or not at all.

At the moment, Belinda, who had gradually edged near the cages, uttered a chirping sort of call. The pigeon looked about, then suddenly stretched out its wings and flew straight for Belinda, who caught and held it in her hands.

"Let it go!" shouted Lady Saxby.

"Let it go," a hundred voices took up the cry. Quite unmoved, Belinda shook her head, stroking the soft, downy feathers of the bird, its pretty head and throbbing breast.

The creature, startled by the tumult, struggled from her grasp and perched itself on her shoulder. It made a pretty picture; Belinda, with her fair hair and earnest face, turning her cheek to rest against the frightened bird.

The next instant there was a report—the bird dropped like a stone to the ground.

"They've killed Belinda!" shrieked Honoria. "Murderers! Villains!"

I put her roughly aside, and hurried to the girl.

"I'm not hurt," she said, "but the bird. Oh, the poor thing!" She stooped and picked up the mass of blood-stained feathers, and, as I live, there were tears in her eyes!

"A wonderful shot, whoever winged the bird," said McAlister. "It wasn't Lady Saxby, I am glad to say. Had the aim been the least little bit lower Miss North would have been hurt. I wonder who it was?"

As he spoke I glanced to the other side of the lawn, where stood a slight, fair man carrying a smoking revolver. I had guessed instinctively that it was he, but the emotion of the moment forced a cry of surprise from my lips. Honoria looked up, and, by a most horrible mischance, her eyes fell upon that figure also.

"Eastacres!" she said. "Eastacres!" and her face went the colour of ashes.

I gripped her tightly by the arm. "If you tell Belinda your brother's here, I'll telegraph for Mark. You hear me? Don't you dare to disobey."

She listened with the usual air of helplessness, and a sort of sullen apathy that had lately shown itself in her.

"I shan't tell Belinda," she said dully—"I daren't."

A moment later I caught a look upon her face that gave me an unpleasant thrill. She was gazing at me, at *me*, who had done so much for her, who had actually paid away a hundred pounds to her wretch of a husband, with an expression of the deepest malignity. I mean it, malignity. I had not thought that she possessed sufficient character to feel, much less to look, malignant.

Her face relapsed into vacuity as she met my eyes. For a moment I was puzzled. I had not injured her; even so, she was so weakly good-natured that she would have forgiven any injury to herself. Could it be that she resented my conduct to Belinda and hated me because of it?

I dismissed the suggestion and decided that Honoria's expression was one of the nervous grimaces which at times contracted her features.

I sent a message to Eastacres telling him to meet me that evening in the gardens of the Casino.

Crawley, who always used to follow in my wake, had arrived at Monte Carlo that same morning. I confided Belinda and Honoria to his care, and having left them fascinated with the roll of the roulette wheel and the monotonous cry of the croupier, "*Messieurs, Mésdames, faites votre jeu*," went to keep my *rendezvous*.

"Eastacres," I said sharply, "what possessed you this afternoon? It's the barest chance in the world that Belinda didn't see you. As it is Honoria caught sight of you, and I only just managed to stop her telling Belinda."

"Well," he said calmly—"what then?"

I could have shaken him for his assumed stupidity.

"Do you not realise that the success of our scheme, yours and mine, depends on Belinda's belief that she is free from your attentions? If she dreamt that you were here in this place she would refuse to stir out of her room. She has a dislike, a detestation of you that amounts to a mania.

"She always disliked you except at the very first, but lately, since, since"—my eyes wavered under his sneer—"well, for the past three months she has feared you. I tell you it is of the utmost importance that she should not know you are here."

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"I should have thought you'd have had her under better control by this time," he said. "It doesn't say much for your system, Lady Peggy, if the girl has still sufficient will to defy you. Still, I'm glad to hear she's afraid of me. It was her defiance that used to so enrage me."

"Look here," he added quickly, "why not turn this fear to good account? I've an idea, risky, but not more so than yours. And it has this advantage, that I can put it into practice very soon. No, I shan't tell you what it is. You must wait—like Belinda."

He left me much perturbed. There was that in his manner which alarmed me. I profoundly mistrusted Eastacres.

On my way back to my charges I passed through the Casino; vast salons, each with their tables thronged and crowded, blazing with light, that fell upon the smooth green cloth—a strip of sward, where gamblers nightly fight a duel with Chance—the faces of the players and their hands.

Your *habitués* of the tables preserve calm, impassive faces, whether luck be for or against them; only by the tremor of the hands, the twitching of the fingers, do they betray themselves. There they sit, night after night, a crowd of Poles, Russians, British, French, men and women of every nationality, all going to conquer the bank that every day repulses and breaks the crowds as a rock breaks the waves of the sea.

Great ladies elbow women from whom, outside the Casino, they withdraw their skirts; delicate, high-bred beauties discuss the chances of the game with thick-lipped Jewesses, whose necks and arms blaze with diamonds, and whose breath reeks of garlic.

The atmosphere grows hotter and hotter, the faces of the players whiten in the heat of the air and their own passions, and over all, like the voice of Fate, sounds the cry of the croupier:

"*Faites votre jeu, Messieurs et Mesdames, faites votre jeu!*"

"On red, on black," the voices cry round the table, piles of gold, of notes are pushed in position, and then the roulette wheel revolves slowly at first, then quicker.

"*Rouge gagne, rouge gagne,*" cries a little blonde who has staked her night's winnings upon red. And then the wheel slackens. "*Rouge perd.*" With a cry that she cannot strangle the blonde hurries from the table. The croupier rakes in her gold, and a tall, sallow woman steps into her place.

Some of the players are to be found year after year at the Casino. The Countess of Carmegan is familiar as the roulette wheel itself. A tall, slim woman of *eighty-five*, she presents a wonderful spectacle.

As you enter the room the elegance of her figure, the distinction of her bearing, impresses you. Exquisitely dressed, as a rule in pure white, with costly jewels and rich laces, at first sight you take her for a woman in the twenties. Her face is pink and white as a girl's, her hair a pale gold, her lips and teeth fresh as youth itself.

But when she looks at you, you feel a shiver almost of repulsion. Out of that youthful face stare eyes that are so old that you have a longing to cover them. She has spent a fortune on her frail old body. A new skin has been grafted on her face, and her hair has been preserved to a marvel. But all the wealth, all the knowledge of the world, can't alter her eyes. They bring a shuddering sense as of death on the beholder.

Within a few feet of her used to sit the Marquess of Dalesford and his brothers, the three finest men in Warwickshire, all of them over six feet, handsome, and careless.

Since then, the time of which I write, two are dead, the third gone under. The Marquess broke his neck trying to jump the family vault in the old churchyard in Warwickshire; the second shot himself; and the third, worst fate of all, married a nursery governess!

When certain great personages visit Monte Carlo *incognito* or otherwise, the management arrange that they shall play in private undisturbed and undetected. The late Empress of Austria had a salon reserved for her exclusive use, none entered it but her Majesty and those guests she honoured by an invitation.

My dear friend, the Countess of Warminster—her husband's position in the Cabinet at home prevented her gambling at the public tables—had a delicious little cabinet in the Casino where she and her friends played baccarat and roulette till the sun was high in the Heavens.

It was an exquisite apartment, the walls lined with cream satin, with a moulded gilt arabesque along the top; the floor was of parqueted oak, with thick Persian rugs; on the mantelpiece was a silver clock which unceasingly told the hours.

To this salon the Countess had easy access. Her beautiful villa above the town was built at an angle of the Casino, and a little private lawn stretched down in front of it to a terrace overlooking the sea. Crocuses, narcissi, and daffodils were sown all over the grass, and in the early Spring it used to look like a foreground of a pre-Raphaelite sketch.

In the pauses of play one could hear from the terrace a troupe of minstrels, or a famous violinist.

I visited the Countess' cabinet on my way back to Belinda. There were some six or eight people present, four men and as many women. Most of them were known to me and returned my greeting with enthusiasm. One of the men who had been looking out of the open window, suddenly drew in his head and turned to me abruptly.

For a moment I was too astonished to speak. I had need to be—it was my son-in-law, Millicent's husband.

"My dear Eric," I said, "this is very nice. Where is Millicent?"

He made no offer to take my outstretched hand, but plunged his own deep in his pockets.

"I don't know," he said.

"Eric!" I glanced at him suspiciously.

He was a man of coarse tastes, and—so Millicent said—took more brandy than was good for him or agreeable to his friends. Brandy makes a man brutal. I could not detect any signs that he had been drinking, however, and decided he was sulky. Possibly Millicent had upset him. She was trying at times, and more than a little extravagant.

"Is Millicent in Monte Carlo, Eric?" I asked, under my breath.

"*Is she at Monte Carlo?*" he repeated, jeering. "Don't you know?" he turned upon me fiercely—"don't you know that she's here? She and that underbred cur of a musician."

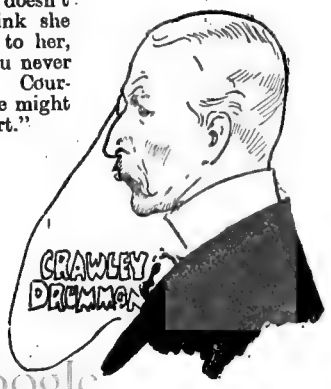
I caught my breath and felt the blood rush to my cheeks. The women looked at me maliciously. Courthorpe had been one of the catches of the season, and they have never forgiven me for marrying him to Millicent.

"If you want her," he continued, "find her. Don't ask me about her, that's all." He lounged off in his ungraceful fashion. I turned, distressed, to the Countess of Warminster.

"What is it?" I murmured. "I cannot understand what he means?"

"If you asked me *who* it was, Peggy, the question would be more to the point. Millicent's intrigues are notorious. She has had more scandals since her marriage, not a twelvemonth ago, than I've concealed in my whole life.

"At present, my dear, I believe it's Felix, the singer. Eric takes it rather foolishly, doesn't he? All the same, I think she should be careful. Talk to her, talk to her, my dear. You never know what men will do. Courthorpe's an awful beast, he might put her in the divorce court."



"Where is Courthorpe staying? I suppose she—she hasn't left him?"

"I think not — yet. They're at the Hotel Anglaise. Millicent is here to-night. I fancy Courthorpe was watching her and Felix just now on the terrace."

I needed no second word, but hurried out to

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the terrace—that beautiful place where, at the time England is the home of snow, one can look upon orange groves, rose trees, gardens of lilies, groves of wild olives, with the sea like a lake of *lapis lazuli* beyond.

I found my daughter by herself. She had dismissed Felix, and was leaning moodily against the balustrade. Our interview was very painful. I urged upon her the foolishness, the wickedness of flying in the face of Society, and aggravating Courthorpe. She replied with an audacity worthy of Belinda herself.

"I am tired of Society and its subterfuges, its shams and its lies. I may do what I like it seems, so long as it is not done openly, in the light of day. I may have twenty lovers if I wish, so long as I behave discreetly, and do not endanger my marriage settlement. I have lived a life of torture since you married me.

"My husband is a brute—a brute, I say! Look!" She lifted the lace sleeve of her evening gown and pointed to an ugly bruise upon her arm. "Not only does he strike me, but he abuses me, hurls such names and epithets at me that no brave, no decent woman would endure. My life is one never-ending torment; not an hour, not a minute I am not subject to his insults, his abuse."

"You must have give him cause, Millicent. Eric is a jealous man."

"I have given him no cause!" she cried. "I am not like those other women, who smile to my face and vilify me behind my back. Felix is my friend, my best friend, no more."

"You will have to give him up, Millicent."

"Never!" she answered defiantly.

"What are you going to do, then, you foolish and misguided girl?"

"I'm going to leave my husband," she said proudly, "the man who has made my life a burden for the past year."

"*Millicent!*" I caught and held her tightly.

"Don't mistake me, mother. I shan't leave Courthorpe for any other man. I'm going to live by myself, that's all. I'm going to make my own way in the world, as I should have done long ago but for you."

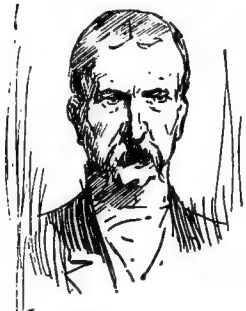
"You are mad!" I said, "quite mad!"

She laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"I knew you'd say that," she returned. "Still, I mean it. I mean to study painting, to work hard, *hard*, and earn my own living. I shall study at Duran's Atelier in Paris. You know he told me as a little girl that I had talent, and Hervé will help me. I shall leave for Paris to-morrow. I have told Courthorpe my decision. And now," she turned to me, "good-bye." She kissed me lightly on the cheek, and, before I had time to stop her, passed out of sight.

The wretched, misguided girl kept her word. She left a splendid house, threw up an immense income, sacrificed a great position—to live in a condition little removed from a workgirl, in Paris. And all because she wouldn't try to manage her husband. In my hands he would have been as wax.

The interview not only upset me on her account, but on my own. If the worst came to the worst I always thought I could make my home with Millicent. Now even that refuge was denied me.



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

My other daughters were quite estranged from me—their husbands even more so. The blankness of despair settled on me for a moment. Then I took courage once again—and sought Belinda.

I had expected to find her sitting pensive at the tables, looking as much out of place as a saint from the Middle Ages. To my astonishment I found her in the grip of the gaming fever. She was winning, and the pile of gold before her rapidly increased.

Her youth, her beauty, and the rumours of her wealth, had attracted general attention. Women stopped on the way to their seats to touch her dress and to ask her for a number—the custom in Monte Carlo, where a lucky player is regarded as a mascot.

It was getting late, and I was anxious to leave the Casino. I touched Belinda's arm and pointed to the clock, but she paid no heed to me.

With flushed cheeks and eyes dilated with fever, and with the drug of which she took increasing quantities, she fixed her attention on the spinning roulette wheel.

The crowd pressed nearer, commenting audibly upon her luck, her loveliness, her youth. There had been a masked ball that night at one of the hotels, and, in the interval some of the dancers came to the Casino to chat with their friends, and whisper unpleasantnesses to their rivals.

One figure attracted my attention. He was in black from head to foot, black domino, black mask, with a hood of the same sable hue.

He dropped into a chair close to Belinda, and started play at once with the coolness of a finished gambler. His hands were cool and steady as a rock, not so much as by the twitching of a finger did he betray emotion when he lost or when he gained.

He played on steadily until the rooms gradually thinning were almost empty. Once again I urged Belinda to retire, but with more than her usual obstinacy she refused. This time Honoria added her intreaties to my commands.

"Come, dear," she said, "I can't bear to see you in this place."

Belinda took no notice of her appeal, and shook off the timid hand that rested for a moment on her shoulders.

Honoria, much distressed, left the table to wander up and down the room, pausing every now and then behind the black domino, as if he exercised a fascination over her.

At last he and Belinda were the only remaining players. With a courteous gesture he bent forward and said softly—

"You have won largely to-night. Are you content with your winnings?"

"I could go on for ever," she said. "It is wonderful."

"Shall we have a game to ourselves, just you and I? It will be more exciting even than roulette!"

"If you like," she said eagerly.

I judged it time to interfere, but as I approached, a sudden movement of the black domino restrained me.

"See," he divided his winnings into three. "I will stake a third of my possessions that the card which I turn up will be higher than yours." He motioned the croupier for a pack. After a whispered colloquy that individual agreed to allow the informal procedure of a gamble without the bank!

Belinda, her eyes aflame, nodded, and separating a third of her winnings, signed that she was ready.

"Cut, mademoiselle," he placed the cards before her, "if you please."

With a catching of the breath she cut the pack and held up the queen of hearts.

The black domino bowed, lifted a single card—it was the king of the same suit.

Belinda pushed over her share, shuffled her cards, and cut again. For a second time the black domino's card was the higher.

"Bring me another pack!" cried the girl. "These are unlucky cards."

But the new pack brought her no better fortune. Again the black domino was the victor.

"I should like to beat you," she said. "I could in time. I have not yet lost my pluck. I will play for my pearls."

She put the necklace on the table. It followed her gold, as did her bracelets, and all the money she could get from me.

"I hate to own myself defeated," she said fiercely.

"We will try again," he said. "See, mademoiselle, I will stake," he paused, "a hundred thousand pounds against your hand."

He touched the third finger of her right hand as he spoke,

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the finger on which she wore a beautiful diamond. The girl was excited, and I think understood that he meant she should stake her ring.

"It's not worth a hundred thousand pounds, monsieur, but, such as it is, I'll risk it."

She placed her hand, palm downward, on the table; the diamond glittered on her slim finger.

The black domino bowed profoundly.

"Cut, Mademoiselle!" he said. For the last time Belinda raised the cards, turning up a two of spades.

"I think I shall win again," he murmured, and, with a deft movement picked up the lower portion of the pack.

Before he could deal out his card, Honoria, with a wild cry, flung herself upon him.

"No, no!" she cried, "you shall not, you shall never win." Panting, she tore off his mask and flung it on the table.

"Look, look!" she cried, and, with a gesture of contempt—contempt from Honoria!—she pointed at him, mocking, "My brother," she said, "look, it is my brother!"

(The conclusion of this series will appear next Tuesday.)

To Smoke or not to Smoke?

If a Girl Objects to Tobacco, Should she Ask her Fiancé to Cease Smoking?

"You don't care for me one bit, although you say you do!" said Nell indignantly. "You're like all the other men I know."

"I hope the other men don't say they care for you," said Jack. "If you'll give me the names and addresses of those who do, I shall feel inclined to go round and punch their heads for them."

"Yes, punch! That's another man's favourite expression."

"Another man altogether," he queried placidly, "or one of those who say they care for you?"

"You know what I mean. You think less of me than of your dirty pipe and your wretched tobacco!"

"Another girl's favourite expression!" said Jack. "If you will allow me to paraphrase your remark."

"Oh, don't consider me," said Nell, in rather a shaky voice.

"I could argue better if I didn't," he answered diplomatically.

"It doesn't matter so much now, because I can go into another room when you begin to smoke."

"Yes," groaned Jack; "and you do regularly, and I have to choose between two——"

"Two evils—the tobacco and me. Say what you mean, please."

"Two evils—giving up your society or putting my pipe aside. But you must admit that I never hesitate."

"N—no."

"And besides, I read somewhere that smoking is good for asthma."

"But you don't suffer from asthma?"

"No, because I smoke."

"I won't grumble if you'll promise not to smoke again until you have asthma."

"A man doesn't postpone saving until he's short of money," said Jack tentatively.

"But you really must choose between us. You know that wretched tobacco makes me quite ill. You're always saying you'd do anything to please me, and here's a chance. For it would please me a very, very great deal and I should think ever so much more of you, Jack. You don't want to give me up and make me miserable for ever, do you?"

"My ambition lies exactly the other way, and you know that, Nell."

"Then you'll give up tobacco to make me happy?"

"I—— Oh, I never said so, really."

"But you and I can understand each other without words. You know I think so much of you, Jack, that I can read your thoughts before you speak them."

"And before I think them too," groaned Jack to himself. "You don't mean it seriously, Nell?"

"Yes, I do."

"I'll agree not to smoke after we're married except in certain rooms hereinafter to be set forth and defined, coloured pink in the plan," and Jack smiled, though in rather a sickly manner.

"I didn't think you would try to dodge out of it like that," said Nell scornfully. "Which do you choose to give up entirely?"

"It's scarcely reasonable——"

"If you cared for me you wouldn't hesitate like this. Which is it to be, please?"

By this time they had reached the house, where Nell lived.

He opened the garden-gate for her and rang the bell, then he turned to her for a last appeal.

"Do you really mean it, Nell?" he asked in trembling accents. "Do you mean to say 'Good-bye' because we don't quite agree on one subject, and that not an important one?"

"If it isn't important, you can give way. All right, Jane, I'll close the door."

"As a matter of principle I can't yield altogether. I've offered to meet you halfway."

"I don't care. If you cared for me really, you wouldn't find it so hard to choose."

"I want us to start fair when we're married," he said firmly, "And to give way to your unreasonable wish now would only cause trouble later on. You would always want your own way."

"Indeed, you shouldn't say such things. I never want my own way, and it isn't nice of you to say so. But, never mind. If you don't care sufficiently for me we'll say 'Good-bye.'"

"Good-bye, then," said Jack, as she hurried into the house.

She ran straight up to her own room, for her lips were quivering and the long-repressed tears were agitating to the surface.

As for Jack, he strode down the road in a regular tornado of rage, though he refused to admit even to himself that Nell had been more than unreasonable. But as it was necessary or him to find some outlet, he kicked savagely at every stone

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that lay in the path, and finally banged the garden-gate with an energy that was, somehow, very consoling.

* * * * *

Nell's three brothers were sitting in the dining-room, smoking the blackest of tobacco through the noisiest of pipes.

"Is she likely to come in soon?" whispered Tom, the youngest. "Because, if she doesn't, this pipe will get me down. It's frightfully strong."

"Hsh! I can hear her now."

"No, it's someone tapping at the window—it's Jack! You go to the door, Tom, and keep Nell out for a few minutes."

Then he opened the widow. "Just a moment," he whispered. "We've got the room to look like a condensed battlefield in the days of black powder. Nell's in the hall, wait a minute, old man, and then we'll give you a leg-up through the window."

"I came to say that it's off," whispered Jack. "I don't like——"

"Rubbish, old chap! We've taken this matter up now, so don't worry yourself."

"Hello! here's Nell!" said Tom, in a warning voice, and his elder brother left the window hurriedly.

"Oh, how dreadfully smoky this room is!" cried Nell, as she entered. "You boys shouldn't use such strong tobacco."

"Just what Jack would say," says Fred gravely. "He doesn't believe in these strong mixtures, prefers light flake or some such rubbish."

"It isn't rubbish!" she said, colouring furiously. "And it's a lot more gentlemanly than your 'strong mixtures' which are far too strong for boys. I'm sure Tom isn't well."

"Nonsense!" said that young man, drawing vigorously. "Never felt better in my life."

"Then your looks go by contraries," she said wickedly. "For you never looked worse in your life. But I'm going out. I can't stand this any longer."

"Neither can I," murmured Tom faintly, as she disappeared, "another two minutes would have finished me."

His two elder brothers ran to the window, opened it, and whistled softly. Next moment they had drawn Jack up to the sill. As soon as he had grasped this, he was right, for he gripped the projecting woodwork of the window-frame and swarmed up into the room in an instant.

"Now's your chance, old chap," said Fred hurriedly. "She's gone to the drawing-room and Elsie is there with the ladies' cigarettes. Choose your time and go in and win."

"I really don't like it," said Jack doubtfully.

"Rubbish," and they took him in charge and led him out into the hall. "We've picked you as a suitable husband for Nell, and marry her you must." And even Tom patted him feebly on the back as he passed.

* * * * *

"What have you got there, Elsie? Chocolates?"

"No," said Nell's younger sister. "It's—er—tobacco. It's a packet of cigarettes."

"What!" cried Nell. "You are going to smoke?"

"I don't know," said Elsie doubtfully. "But—but look here, will you swear not to tell anyone?"

"Yes, I can promise that."

"Well, those wretched boys are always talking about the pleasure they find in smoking, so I've determined to test it for myself. You won't tell?"

"No."

"I daren't try any of their tobacco, because it's too strong, and Jack isn't here. Oh, I beg your pardon—I——"

"All right," said Nell wistfully. "Jack wouldn't smoke such rubbish as the boys do. His tobacco's ever so much nicer."

"I bought this packet of American cigarettes some weeks ago, but forgot them until to-day. They're advertised as a cheap brand, twenty-five for threepence. It isn't very extravagant, is it?" she asked anxiously.

"Elsie! Elsie!" cried someone.

"There's someone calling me," she said, pretending to listen.

Then Tom stepped back from beside the door, where he had been standing, and ran into the room. "Well, you might come, Elsie," he grumbled, "when a fellow calls for you."

"Depends upon what a fellow wants?" said Elsie, going with him nevertheless. She turned to Nell for a moment. "Why don't you try one?" she whispered. "I know what Tom wants.

"I promised to go out with him on the tandem, and Fred and Charlie are coming as well. You'll have a splendid chance, for we shall be away at least an hour." And away she ran, followed by Tom, and waving her hand encouragingly to Jack as she passed him in the hall.

Left alone, Nell stood thinking deeply, with one foot tapping gently upon the fender. Already she realised that she had taken up a wrong position. The ultimatum which had seemed so heroic twenty-four hours ago, was now a memory of which she felt rather ashamed. "I'm very glad he didn't give way to me," she murmured, and it was a great pity she didn't speak a little louder.

As for poor Jack, by-the-bye, who had received strict instructions to count twenty after he heard the striking of a match, he was beginning to "wobble" as Tom would have said.

The idea that had been with him throughout the conspiracy, now recurred with still greater force. He did not like to regain his Nell by means of a trick. It was all very well for Elsie and her brothers, to whom the whole affair was in the nature of a joke.

"I won't do it," he muttered, and turned to go.

"I won't do it," said Nell, as though echoing his thoughts, and Jack came to a standstill in amazement.

Nell also had made up her mind. If Jack liked to smoke he had a right to do so and she had no right to prevent him, especially as he was willing not to smoke when she was present. On the other hand, Nell started with a prejudice against tobacco, and to smoke a cigarette would probably not alter her feeling in the matter.

"I'll write to him and tell him I'm very sorry," she said, and sat down to the table with that intention. Jack heard this remark, and resolved to wait no longer. He walked into the room and found himself standing behind Nell, who was leaning forward to dip her pen in the ink. Knowing that the letter was for himself, he had no compunction in reading.

"My dear Jack," she wrote, and then threw the pen down in dismay. "Oh, I don't know how to write," she murmured. "But if he were here I could soon tell him all about it."

"Proceed," quoth Jack, and leant over her shoulder and kissed her.

Wal Frank.

Result of the "Verse" Competition.

The Gramophone prizes have been awarded as follows:

W. F. Pearson, 15 Shafton Road, South Hackney, N.E.; J. Perritt, 19 Russell Place, Norfolk Street, Hull; Mrs. Brownlie, St. Margaret's Manse, Hawick, N.B.; Captain Malam, Little Clacton, Essex; J. M. Andsley, 39 Caird Drive, Partickhill, Glasgow; F. Woolfall, "Meadows Hotel," Conway Street, Birkenhead; Mrs. E. B. Christie, Middletown Rectory, Tynan, Co. Armagh; H. Jackson, 10 Hamilton Road, New Brighton, Cheshire; J. H. Edwards, Rawnsley, Hednesford, Staffs.; W. Roberts, 2 New Cottages, Priory Road, Tonbridge.

Result of the "Request" Competition.

The Gramophone prizes have been awarded as follows:

J. Braidwood, 6 Gladstone Terrace, Edinburgh; R. Wright, 10 Gloster Place, Maindee, Newport, Mon.; C. Phillips, 20 The Terrace, Penzance; Miss M. Roe, 49 Newton Road, Ashton, Preston; F. J. Smart, 198 St. Saviours Road, Saltley, Birmingham; Miss F. Macintosh, Ambrose Villa, Milton Street, Southend-on-Sea; E. Moore, 69 Hamilton Road, Handsorth, Birmingham; M. E. Roe, Vineleigh, Billingshurst; H. Apps, 4 Chapel Street, Off Willow Home, Carlisle; W. Parfitt, 55 Glandwr Street, Abertillery, Newport, Mon.

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BRAND NEW COMPETITION.

Starts in Two Weeks.

Cash Down. *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

30 Prizes of 10s. Each.

An entirely new competition will be placed before the public for the first time in "Short Stories" dated March 28th. It will be exceedingly simple, and will be open to every person who reads "Short Stories."

WHAT YOU WILL HAVE TO DO.

The competition will consist of paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom. You will have to write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of Railway Stations under the conditions stated.

The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

THE FIRST PARAGRAPHS WILL APPEAR IN *SHORT STORIES* DATED MARCH 28th. ORDER YOUR COPY NOW.

CHARLOTTE: "Oh, how slippery these rocks are. Take a good hold of my arm, John, and if I slip hold on like grim death; but if you slip, for goodness' sake let go."

PARVENU HOSTESS (to stable-boy, attired as waiter for the occasion of a dinner party): "James, why do you not fill Mr. de Gluttonne's glass?" James: "Lor', ma'am, what's the use? He empties it as fast as I fill it."

JONES: "I tell you, Miss Flywings is the most realistic actress I have ever seen." "How's that?" "Why, the other night, in the 'Maiden's Moon,' she laughed so bitterly that she had to eat a piece of sugar to get the taste out of her mouth."

MRS. WEATHERWAX: "I don't see where all the money comes from for these wars they are carrying on all over the earth?" Mr. Weatherwax: "I don't know myself, but it seems to me that map publishers ought to subscribe some of it, anyway."

"GOOD-DAY, Mrs. Brown, how is your husband this morning?" asked one countrywoman of another whose husband was ill. "Well, I think he's a bit better," was the reply. "He sat up for an hour yesterday, and had a little appetite. He ate a couple of chops, a veal and 'am pie, two helpings of apple pudding, and a snack o' cheese. I think by to-morrow he'll be able to swallow something substantial."

HE: "But couldn't you learn to love me, Ida?" She: "I don't think I could, George." He (reaching for his hat): "It was as I feared. You are too old to learn."

HER FATHER (coming suddenly into the room): "Eh, what is this?" Her Lover: "I was telling Miss Budd a story." Her Father: "With your arm round her waist? Her Lover: "Er—yes, sir. It was a love story."

"DON'T talk about life insurance companies to me," said Mrs. Waggles indignantly: "they aren't any good. Why, when my poor husband lay a-dyin' I sent word to the Profitable Assurance Company to come up and insure his life at once, and do you know the heathens wouldn't do it?"

LADY: "This house would suit me, but there are not enough cupboards." Landlord: "The number can easily be doubled." Lady: "Very well, then, I'll sign the lease." Landlord (half an hour later): "George, send a carpenter to that house to divide each of those cupboards into two."

A FRENCH lady who is on her first visit to England, was walking in Kew Gardens the other day. She was, on the whole, much pleased, but was greatly shocked at the notice, which she read at every turn, that "Birds-nesting is strictly forbidden." "How severe and cruel you are in this country," she at last sorrowfully exclaimed, "that even the little birds may not make their nests in your public gardens!"

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GREAT NEW SERIES. **YOU CAN BEGIN HERE.**

Confessions of a Self-made Girl

The writer of these Confessions relates in this series of articles the true story of her life, from the time when she left Cornwall, an unsophisticated but ambitious girl, until she made her name and fortune. Her name is well known to you.

[*For the purposes of these Confessions I am calling myself Maud Cardew, as my real name is too well known for me to wish to make the story of my life public in this manner.*]

MY HEART'S DESIRE.

I AM a native of a seaside village in Cornwall. As I grew up I began to tire of the monotony of the life and determined to go out into the world and make a name for myself.

One day when I was in the ruins of the Old Keep, which is on the cliffs, meditating upon what I should do were I free to carve out my own destiny, two strangers appeared—evidently tourists, I thought. They told me they had decided to stay in the neighbourhood for a few days, and asked if I knew of any lodgings. I said that my father would be glad to put them up at the farm, and accordingly they came home with me.

I was delighted to find that they could tell me a great deal about the world I was so anxious to see. And you may be sure that I availed myself of every opportunity to learn what I could, and what they told me only fired my ambitions all the more.

Their names were the Honourable Robert Lestrange (commonly called Bobbie) and Di Northcote. Bobbie had just finished sowing an over-plentiful crop of wild oats, and had been sent off into the country under Mr. Northcote's care to be out of harm's way for a time.

I told these two Londoners of my desire to see the world. Bobbie encouraged me in my ambitions, but Di advised me to stay at home. This, however, was not at all in my line, as I told him, and when he saw that nothing would shake me from my resolve, he promised to try to find something for me to do when I arrived in the great city.

Though I did not like Di nearly so well as I did Bobbie, something instinctively seemed to draw me to him and caused me to look up to him.

I amused Bobbie and Di by my absolute ignorance of the world to which they belonged, and the latter warned me of some of the pitfalls into which a pretty girl—such as they told me I was—was liable to fall. I made up my mind that I would do marvellous things, and, if possible, become a great lady of the land—a duchess if possible.

First Experiences in London.

I HAVE only too great reason to remember my first arrival in London, for it was attended by very unlooked for, and lone too pleasant experiences. The train was due at Waterloo about three, and as we drew near the city the atmosphere grew blacker and blacker, until it became as dark as night.

At first I was more curious than otherwise, this being my first glimpse of a genuine London fog, but when two other girls in the carriage began expressing anxious alarm as to whether certain of their friends would manage to get to the station to meet them, I grew frightened.

For I did not even know where I was going. In a letter, Bobbie had promised to get me lodgings and meet me, and I had simply left everything to him. Consequently, if anything happened to prevent his turning up, I should find myself in a very awkward plight.

Great was my relief, therefore, when, the moment I alighted, his well-known figure loomed out of the gloom and accosted me eagerly.

"How do you do, Miss Cardew?" he said, with evident pleasure. "This is a curious welcome and no mistake. London has put on one of her extra special best fogs in your honour. No doubt it is intended as a background to the brilliancy which she knows you bring with you," and he made me a little bow.

"I was getting so frightened lest you shouldn't get here," I said, not heeding his compliment. "Whatever should I have done?"

"It would certainly have been awkward, and I did have rather a bother. However, all's well that ends well—I've got you a comfortable bed-sitting-room in Bloomsbury, and Di has got you a job. He's going to call on you to-morrow morning. I hope you'll find plenty of soap, because he won't know you after this fog if you don't."

"Is Bloomsbury far?" I asked, beginning to choke and cough. "What a filthy atmosphere!"

"Oh, you'll get used to this," he laughed. "Sometimes we can't see each other in London for weeks on end. People come up from the country to live here because they love shops, and airing gay costumes—and this is what they get."

"When the fog lifts, you'll find you're nearly as black as a sweep. You had better take my arm, because if we got separated, we should not find each other easily."

"Where to, sir?" asked the porter carrying my box. "The underground railway is the best to-day, if it's at all in the right direction."

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"Twenty-six Guilford Street, Bloomsbury," Bobbie read off a card. "It's the Russell Square end." He stopped to think a minute, adding, "No, we'll take a cab. The man who brought me here will manage it somehow."

We started off at a snail's pace, into what seemed a gulf of darkness, for the fog had come down suddenly, and very few of the street lamps had yet been lit. Bobbie chatted on, but I paid little heed to what he said, being far too anxious about our safe progress.

After some twenty minutes we came to a sudden standstill, and found two large drays had collided, blocking the whole road. The horses in both were getting unmanageable through fright, and we decided it was safest to alight for a few minutes.

I did not know Bobbie well enough then, but afterwards I understood how impossible it was for him to help going into the fray.

Whenever anything in any degree "untoward" happened in Bobbie's vicinity, he was bound to be in the thick of it, from a Royal procession to a street fight.

"Don't stir!" he exclaimed to me; "I must go to that horse's head."

It was all very well in theory, but when one of the dray horses appeared to be coming recklessly towards me, it was quite another thing in practice; and I turned and fled.

As a matter of fact it had merely been extricated from the harness, and a man was leading it; but, unnerved by the extraordinary darkness and half blinded by the fog, I imagined it had broken loose, and was coming straight down upon me. When I tried to get back a little later, I was hopelessly lost.

I tried a few steps first in one direction, and then another, without seeming to get anywhere, till at last I felt too frightened to move, and more inclined to sit down on the kerb and cry than anything.

While I stood trying to pull myself together and think of a plan, a tall, dark figure groped its way up to me, and turned to mount the steps of a house close by. At the top he paused, however, and finally came back.

"Are you lost?" he said politely, raising his hat. "Can I be of any service to you?"

"Oh, thank you!" I exclaimed, feeling as if an angel had dropped from the skies; "I am with a friend who is quite near, only I can't find him!" And I proceeded to relate what had happened, and explained my utter ignorance of London.

"Where is it you want to go?" he asked, and fortunately I remembered the address Bobbie had given the cabman, telling him at once. "Twenty-six Guilford Street, Bloomsbury."

"It is a long way off," he said. "I wonder if I could find your friend?"

"Oh, don't go away!" I cried; "you will never get back to me."

"I think the best plan for you will be to come in here, and see if the fog clears a little presently," he said at once, turning again to the steps; "you and your friend will never find each other as it is now."

I thought it was extremely kind of him, and followed gladly, too thankful not to be alone to care about anything else.

He led the way across the hall, and then ushered me into a small sitting-room, which was practically in darkness. When he had lighted the gas he turned and regarded me scrutinisingly with a pair of bold, black eyes.

I felt myself shrink a little, but attempted to appear at ease, and to glance casually round the room. Before I had got half way round, however, my eyes quickly sought the fireplace, and I felt my cheeks grow crimson. That was the first bachelor's den I had ever been into, and I had not yet learnt to appreciate high art.

"Won't you sit down," he said, pushing a chair towards the fire. "May I ring for some tea; the fog will not lift just yet, and it will help to drown the taste of it!" And he rang the bell without waiting for me to speak.

Not that I minded, for I was very tired and very hungry, and the idea of tea was most welcome.

When the servant came in, however, her expression as she glanced towards me, gave me an odd self-conscious feeling; and I remember I had a strong inclination to get up and box her ears. Why, I hardly know, but what with my host's continued scrutiny, and the maid's vaguely insinuating glance, I began to wonder what I had done.

On the chimney-piece were a quantity of photographs, chiefly of actresses, and, anxious to start a conversation, I picked one or two up and inquired about them.

My not knowing Ellen Terry when I saw her seemed to amuse him rather, and he asked me in a friendly way, where I came from. I told him "the wilds of Cornwall," and he bowed, remarking. "Very fair flowers grow in the wilds of Cornwall." Then he added: "May I ask why one of the fairest has been transplanted to this land of fog?"

"I have come to London to make my fortune," I said simply. "It is rather a weakness with the Cornish."

"It seems to me," he replied; "that if you are on a similar standing with a certain young lady in a well-known nursery rhyme, your fortune is already made."

DI coolly put on his eyeglass and looked at me again.

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"It is what I have come to prove," I answered, and just then the servant entered with the tea-tray.

"You must do me the honour of pouring out," he said, and I did not know how to refuse, though I felt more and more that I was in a false position. At the same time my woman's love of pretty things was sufficiently strong to enable me to greatly appreciate the beautiful silver tray and tea service, and the exquisite china; and I could not restrain a certain pleasure at the prospect of dispensing the soothing cup under such circumstances.

I had never seen a silver tea-pot before, much less handled one, and this was dainty beyond words. I was much interested also in the crest and motto on the tray, and, curious to know the identity of my unlooked-for companion.

Tea proceeded pleasantly enough on the whole, except that I wished he would not stare so; but after tea he began to grow decidedly familiar. He talked to me in an easy, pointed way that I have since learnt how to take; but that afternoon I own I felt hopelessly at sea.

Meanwhile the fog continued in density, and the problem of my next move began to assume alarming dimensions.

"What shall I do if the fog doesn't lift?" I asked at last, unable to hide my anxiety any longer.

A curious expression crossed his eyes which frightened me a little, but he only said, "Oh, it is sure to lift presently. Are you tired of my company?"

I murmured something about being glad to get home, and then he produced a large album of photographic views, and asked me if I should care to look at it. I thought it would be an escape from a rather embarrassing conversation, and assented at once.

He then seated himself close beside me on the sofa, and opened the book upon our joint knees. I edged away at once; and he came a little nearer; and this continued at short intervals until I was on the extreme limit of the sofa.

Then my sense of humour saved the situation. I burst out laughing, and, getting up, crossed the room to the fire-place.

"I don't know much about London manners," I said, facing him squarely, "but so far they seem a little peculiar. If you want the whole of the sofa to yourself, why don't you say so, and have done with it."

He laughed too at that; then got up and came and stood on the rug beside me.

"I don't want it all to myself," he said, in a voice that I suppose was meant to be persuasive. "I don't want it at all without you, you little witch."

I made no reply, but I daresay I looked a little dangerous, for he added, in a conciliatory way—"But come! What would you like to do to beguile away the time?"

I crossed to the window and peered out into the fog. "I should like to try to get home," I said firmly.

Again he came and stood beside me, and again I was immediately possessed with a desire to get to the other side of the room.

At the first opportunity I carried out this desire. He followed me, however, and for about fifteen minutes we carried on a disjointed conversation, practically chasing each other round the room. Every time he came close to me, I moved away at once; and after a few moment's pause he followed me. At last I grew very angry, and giving my foot a little stamp, I exclaimed:

"Why can't you make up your mind where to sit, and stop there?"

"That is precisely the question I want to ask you," he said at once, with the utmost coolness.

"I think I will try to get home," I remarked, turning to pick up my coat, which I had taken off.

"It is quite impossible at present," he replied, and stepping forward hastily, put one hand over mine to prevent my getting into my coat.

I shook myself free angrily, and glared at him like some animal at bay. "I shall go at once," I said, "unless you sit down in that chair"—indicating the most distant one—"and stop there."

"In Cornwall," he said, with a slight sneer, "do the men take orders from strangers in their own homes?"

"In Cornwall," I retorted, "the men do not annoy a girl as you do. Had I known, nothing would have induced me to come in here."

He seemed amused.

"This is very mild," he said. "Personally, I consider that under the circumstances I have behaved remarkably well. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have kissed you before now."

"No, they wouldn't," I flashed out, "for I would have boxed their ears."

Again he was amused.

"They wouldn't have minded that," he said—"they like a bit of spirit. I've a good mind to risk it myself." And he took a step forward.

"If you dare," I gasped, and he halted.

"It isn't that I daren't," he said, "but you look so extraordinarily fine, I don't want to spoil the effect."

"You wretch!" I exclaimed, almost crying with rage. "I would rather be in a hundred fogs than here with you. I am going now."

But just at that moment there was a peal at the bell, and as I saw him glance towards the door wonderingly, I waited.

"If it is anyone to see me," he said, "you had better say you are my sister. I will introduce you so."

"You can please yourself about that," I said haughtily. "I shall certainly deny it at once."

"Don't be a little fool," he answered quickly. "It is the proper thing to do."

"I don't care in the least," was my retort. "I came here because I was lost in the fog, and if you don't tell the truth, I shall."

"Well, it won't make much difference," he sneered, "for they won't believe it."

I felt ready to fly at his throat for that, but just then the door opened, and in walked—Di Northcote.

For one moment I was delighted, and my immediate impulse was to dart forward. Suddenly, however, I felt myself grow hot with an unaccountable sense of guiltiness, and stood still silently.

"How do, Trevor?" he said, in his slow, lackadaisical fashion. "I though I'd——" Then he caught sight of me.

He made no exclamation at all, but he just stood still and looked at me. After the first few seconds, he coolly put on his eye-glass and looked again.

I grew hotter and hotter, though I was not aware that I had done anything to be ashamed of, and I tried to look straight back into his face.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure, Miss Cardew," he said sarcastically. "I did not know you had any friends in London."

"I had not," I blurted out. "I got lost in the fog, and this—this—gentleman," I hesitated purposely, "brought me in here."

"Oh, indeed!" with that same, delicate sneer, "And pray where is our friend Bobbie?"

"I don't know. We got separated, and I could not find him."

My rescuer then joined in.

"The lady was just outside my door," he said, "and I asked her to come in and wait a little, as it was impossible to find anyone, or get anywhere, just then."

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"Oh, I quite understand," said Di, speaking very deliberately, "except that the fog has been practically nothing for quite half an hour."

"He said it was just as bad," I exclaimed. "I wanted to start long ago."

"Well you can do so now. I will take you to Bloomsbury myself. I just ran in, Trevor, to ask you to call at Queen's Gate to-morrow morning about those theatricals. There's a hitch somewhere, and the old Dowager wants to see you particularly."

"Right you are!" replied Trevor. "I'll go round early."

I had got into my coat by this time, and now turned at once to the door.

"Good-bye, Miss—Miss——?" said my late host, then paused and held out his hand.

"Good-bye!" I said frigidly, and with the slightest possible bow, hurried forward.

"I hope you will allow me the pleasure of seeing your fair friend again," he said to Di Northcote, as we stood waiting for a hansom. Something in his tone made me bite my lips angrily, and I saw Di flush slightly under his white skin.

"That will be entirely as Miss Cardew pleases," he answered coolly, and with a careless good-bye, escorted me down the steps.

"What a hateful man!" I exclaimed, as we drove off. "Are Londoners all like that?"

"I don't know that Londoners are very different from other men," he replied. "In most cases, what a man is depends a good deal upon whom he is with."

"Do you mean to imply?" I began indignantly.

"I don't mean anything," he said, "beyond a word of warning; but I should like to know what Bobbie is doing all this time? He ought to know how to take care of a girl better than this."

"It wasn't his fault. Besides, I am quite capable of taking care of myself."

"There I beg to differ. No girl who would go alone to the chambers of such a man as Cecil Trevor, or, indeed, to any strange man's chambers, is capable of taking care of herself!"

"You talk as if I went on purpose," I cried indignantly. "I believe you think——"

"Oh, no, I don't," he said carelessly. "I never think anything; it is far the wisest plan. Here we are, I daresay Bobbie is inside, awaiting the next turn of events."

He was quite right, for almost immediately his boyish form appeared in the doorway.

"Good Heavens, where have you been?" he exclaimed, grasping my hand. "I've had an awful time. It was no use looking for you in the fog, so I just came here and waited, hoping you would do the same. I never want such another hour in my life. And where, in the name of fortune, did you pick up Di?"

While he was still talking he led me into the room he had taken for me, and Mr. Northcote followed.

"I shall have to go," said the latter. "I have a dinner on to-night, and it is very late as it is. Good-bye, Miss Cardew, I will call to-morrow at eleven o'clock to tell you about the post I have secured for you." Then he nodded casually and hurried away.

"Well, what happened?" said Bobbie. "Sit down and tell me all about it."

He was lounging on the table himself, swinging one foot and regarding me questioningly. I told him how it was I got separated from him, and how I was frightened, and someone came to the rescue. When I related my going into the stranger's rooms, he muttered a surprised "By Jove!" then looked amused, in spite of himself.

"Mr. Northcote seemed angry," I said. "There was nothing very dreadful about it, was there?"

"Not under the circumstances, but it was rather rash. You don't happen to know who the chap was, do you?"

"Mr. Northcote called him 'Trevor.'"

"What! Cecil Trevor?" he cried quickly.

"Yes, that was the name—why?"

He gave a long, low whistle.

Then he threw back his head and burst out laughing.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You have been into the lion's den. He's one of the worst men in London. I can't help laughing, it's really awfully funny to think of you going there. I'd have given a week's income to have seen Di's face when he found you. He simply hates Trevor—hates him like smoke. Oh, it's too funny!" and he laughed again. "I believe he would rather have found you at the police-station. Oh, good old Di! No wonder he looks distant and sarcastic!"

"Who is Mr. Trevor?" I asked, unable to resist a little curiosity.

"Not anyone who need interest you," said Bobbie, with boyish peremptoriness. "He's a bad lot!"

"He has some nice things," I said, a little mischievously.

"Oh, very likely! He's a duke's grandson, and he's got the 'oof,' but he's a low-down cad all the same. I don't think anything could have riled Di more than finding you with him."

"I don't see what it has to do with Mr. Northcote," I said obstinately. "I am not under his wing, and I am not going to be dictated to by him. He is very domineering. I don't like him."

"Oh, Di's all right! He's one of the best chaps going really, only he's a bit eccentric. He's beastly clever and philosophical, don't you know. That's why we call him Di—short for Diogenes. I don't know who Diogenes was, but he grew in a tub or something.

"I was so clever, you know, that they had to stop my studies for fear I learnt too much. They rather overdid it, because in the end I hardly knew anything at all."

"I don't think Mr. Northcote likes me," I went on. "He always makes me feel that he is sneering at me."

"Oh, that's only his way! He's just the same with everybody. You'll have to keep in with Di, you know, because he can do such a lot for you."

"Why can he do more than you?"

"Oh, well, you see, no one ever takes me seriously. I'm a kind of Society fool, whom they all pat on the back like a good little boy, and do just as they like with. The only marvel is no one has succeeded in landing me with a wife yet. Di, on the other hand, is a sort of high executioner. He tells everyone what ought to be done, and they do it. Even the mothers with marriageable daughters are afraid of Di."

"Why doesn't he marry?" I asked.

"Doesn't want to, I suppose! He'd take a bit of pleasing too, would Di. She'd have to be something very uncommon. Well, I suppose I ought to go now. A great pal of mine used to lodge in this house, and the landlady's rather a decent sort, that's why I took this room.

"She's going to take twelve shillings a week for it, and you've got to find your own grub. When you're broke let me know, and I'll send you a cheque to be repaid when you've married that nobleman you talked of," and he looked at me with a merry twinkle.

"You're awfully good, Bobbie," I said, not knowing how to thank him. "But I hope I'll soon earn some money, and not have to go to

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anyone. What is the occupation Mr. Northcote has got for me?"

"Oh, he'll tell you all about it to-morrow! That's his province entirely. Mine is to look after you generally and see that you don't starve. When I fancy you look hungry I shall take you to have a good 'blow out,' don't you know, and if you're cold I'll bring round a sack of coals.

"It's beastly jolly nice to see you here, you know," he said boyishly. "Will you come out to-morrow afternoon to explore a bit of London?"

I agreed readily, and he went off looking very pleased.

I remember that first night so well. I had practically forgotten the unfortunate incidents of the day, and was all eagerness for the future. The very last thing I stood before the glass and looked at myself for a long time.

"Maud," I said, addressing my reflection, and gazing hard nto my own eyes, "remember, you are never to lose heart. Whatever goes wrong one day, make the best of it, and begin again. Pluck is the best friend you can have just now. Never be afraid, and you are sure to succeed. You have come to London to be famous, and you've got to do it all yourself." I threw back my head and laughed—it was a laugh of triumph.

"You have beauty, Maud," I said to the girl in the glass. "Beauty and brains, you needn't be afraid.

"For beauty is power," I finished, "and power is the thing that matters."

Well, I am not a duchess yet, but I am not ashamed to look that eager, ambitious girl in the face to-day, and that is saying something. What happened when Di Northcote called the next morning I must leave until another day, for I am expecting Bobbie, and if I don't want him to make his fifteenth proposal, I must have all my wits about me.

Not that I don't love him, for I do very much; I think he is just the sweetest boy alive. If I could dig a big hole (it would have to be a big one), and throw all my ambitions and aims into it, I would go up to the altar some fine morning with Bobbie, and we should come away the veriest couple of careless children that ever entered the holy estate of wedlock.

For Bobbie never knows anything about his affairs, and I know still less about mine. One month he will spend like a millionaire, and the next he will not have sixpence.

As for me, Di Northcote manages my money affairs. I really don't know why he should, for we are often not at all good friends, but somehow it answers well, and we just let things bide.

Sometimes when I am very bitter, I say I will break away from him, and I hold forth to myself, or Bobbie if he happens to be there, at great length about my innate hatred of him.

Bobbie always laughs and tells me not to be a fool, and "myself"—well, I can't understand "myself," only I am inclined to think she likes the man better than he deserves or else she is afraid to risk doing without him.

Heigho, but it's a weary world sometimes, even in the midst of success! My room is still heavy with the odour of the beautiful bouquets I brought home the evening before last.

This morning I went round picking out the dead blooms, and doing what I could to encourage the others to live on. And I couldn't help thinking they all seemed tired, as if it were such an effort to bloom in this heavy London atmosphere.

I am sometimes very tired too, and I put my face down among them, feeling like a country flower pining for its native air. I wondered for one wild moment if I would throw it all up, and go away with Bobbie to be careless and light-hearted, to make cowslip balls like children in the sun, and clamber about on the rocks.

A sudden wave of passionate home-sickness swept over me. "Shall I go?" I kept saying. "Shall I go? Bobbie, shall I throw it all up, and you and I go away together, and be like happy children in the sun?"

Well, it passed off, and I sit here again, beautifully dressed, and sip my tea contentedly from priceless china. And, if Bobbie makes that fifteenth proposal presently, I shall laugh at him, and pat his cheek and say, "Win or steal a Dukedom, Bobbie, then come back and fetch me to be your Duchess!"

(Next Tuesday I will tell you about my work.)

Your Editor Chats.

At the time of writing it has not been possible for me to receive any opinions on the merits of the two new features of last Tuesday's *Short Stories*—"Held Apart" and "The Confessions of a Self-made Girl"—but I have no fears that they will not be well received, and if they give you so much pleasure in the reading of them as they gave the authors in writing and myself in getting them I shall be quite satisfied.

The new competition is announced on page 335, and, as you will see, it is very simple and pleasant. It is a most fascinating as well as instructive occupation for the long evenings, and the prizes offered will amply repay the winners for the time spent in finding the correct solutions. The Index to Stations in Bradshaw's Guide, in which all the solutions to the puzzles are to be found, is the one which is being used in the great *Pearson's Weekly* £5 a Week for Life Competition, so if you are going in for that you will not need to purchase a new Index.

Below will be found Lady Peggy Carstairs' reply to the lady readers who objected to the statements she made regarding middle class wives in the articles "How I Chaperoned Belinda":

"To the Editor of *Short Stories*.

"Sir,—Your correspondents seem more concerned to attack me than interested to defend themselves. The facts stated in the article complained of came under my notice while residing in middle-class homes. Since I fell into straitened circumstances I have lived exclusively among the middle-class, and have thus enjoyed unique opportunities of studying their women. Your middle class matron may or may not be a good mother—I did not raise that issue—but I say, and most emphatically, that the great majority are neither cheerful, sympathetic, helpful, nor appreciative wives.

"Your correspondents prove my assertions to a great extent; one and all they write—not as an indignant wife whose deepest feelings have been called in question—but as wearily tired mothers, so weighed with cares for their children that they have not time even to mention their poor husband! They stand self-convicted when they plead maternal solicitude as a justifiable reason for wifely neglect.

"If the women of the middle-class would give more time to their own clothes and less to the children's, if they would expend more thought on their own households and less on their neighbours', concern themselves more with their own faults than with those of 'Society' women, their homes might prove more attractive and their husbands look less careworn. I notice that your men correspondents fully indorse my statements. Alas! They have proved to their cost the truth of what I say.

"Yours faithfully,

"(Signed) "Margaret Carstairs."

It is scarcely necessary for me to tell my readers that I do not at all agree with the views of Lady Peggy Carstairs on this subject. I publish her letter, however, to show how painfully ignorant a woman of her social status is of the genuine pleasures of life. She finds no happiness in middle-class homes—because her idea of happiness is one that does not appeal to the true British housewife. Nevertheless, I am sure that all those who have read "How I Chaperoned Belinda," will admit that money and gaiety do not bring true happiness.

Your Editor.

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The Ghost of Gurnham Mine.

The Tale of a Narrow Escape.

He had failed! He stared at the girl, a savage glow in his dull eyes and his teeth set vindictively behind his red lips.

"I'll be even wi' ye!" he cried hoarsely at last, "I'll be even wi' ye, and that fool of a chap, as you've bin an' took up with o' late. Yo' shan't marry Tom Dashwood, not if I swings fo' it, yo' shan't."

He glared at her, his ugly, reckless face full of an evil light, and the girl fell away a little.

"Don't take it like that, Joe," she said gently. "I can't help liking him the best, and it's cruel to talk like that, even though you don't mean it——"

"But I do," he shouted hoarsely. "I do mean it. If yo' can't marry me yo' shan't marry 'im—a stranger as 'asn't bin in Gurnham six months. I tell yo' yo' shan't."

Bessie turned away and took a step across the dusty lane. Joe stopped her.

"Yo' hear what I say," he shouted again.

Bessie looked up. She was pale and trembling and afraid.

"Yes," she said unsteadily. "But I don't believe you. You wouldn't be unkind——"

He laughed hoarsely.

"Yo'll see," he cried. "It's toime 'e was gone, say I, and I tell yo' yo' ain't goin' to marry nobody but me."

She shrank from him again and this time he let her go, muttering hoarsely to himself as he watched her small, thin figure disappear round the bend of the lane.

She was met at the corner by a man, and Joe Ramsy's dark face grew still darker as he saw who it was.

"It's that chap agen," he muttered, and turned sharply on his heel and went back towards the village.

His face was very dark and hard when he came in sight of the irregular patch of small cottages at last.

He stood for a second, his eyes fixed savagely on the outbuildings and the tall chimney which stood between him and the mine in which he and most of the men in Gurnham worked. His brows knit together savagely as he looked. His teeth set.

"I'll 'ave 'im," he muttered. "'Im an' me's workin' together there a'most by ourselves in the shaft. There's on'y Bill, an' 'e'll 'elp me. 'E's got a grudge agen 'im' isself, an' I'll be even wi' 'im."

He ground out the last words aloud and as he did so a figure rose up from behind the hedge.

"Even with who, might I ask?" he said.

Joe started, turned sharply on his heel and flung out an oath.

"Mind yer own business," he shouted, and turning again strode quickly away.

Will Medwin stared after him.

"He means Tom, I'll bet," he said to himself. "He means mischief to Tom or my name's not what it is. Well, he'd better look out. Tom did me a good turn once and I shan't forget it—even though he wins the girl I love."

Her face flashed for a moment before his eyes—Bessie's face, girlish and bright, that he loved better than his life. He remembered, too, a certain look he had seen upon it, and the pain settled at his heart again. She loved Tom and what did his own pain matter? Tom once saved his life.

They had only been six months in Gurnham as Joe had said. They had come together and had remained there working shoulder by shoulder in the mine in which most of the Gurnham men earned their bread — Will, moody and taciturn, Tom, always cheerful, eager and happy.

But then he well might be, for the girl he loved loved him!

* * * *

It was black in the mine and Joe's lantern sent dim, dark shadows dancing over the dusky walls of shining coal. A narrow rail ran past him and bent away to the right. He walked along it for a little way and then turned in the other direction, followed by a man who had an uneasy look upon his sallow face.

Joe stopped at the narrow entrance and looked round furtively. They were alone at the end of the mine. He flashed his light along the narrow corridor and into the hollow cave. There was no one about. He could say what he had to say there without fear of anyone hearing, but all the same he lowered his voice and spoke in a whisper as he lifted the light of his lantern to the black roof above his head.

"Look," he whispered, "see that?"

Bill lifted his head and stared upwards. A long, narrow, uneven crack ran along the roof and down part of the wall, just at the entrance to the cave.

"See?" Joe whispered.

Bill stepped backwards.

"It wouldn't tak' much to mak' it coom down," he said, "a shout maybe 'ud bring it."

Joe nodded.

"That's it," he whispered. "Dy'e see now what I meant?"

There was an instant's silence. Bill stared hard into Joe's face, into his odd, dull eyes that were alight and glittering now.

"Not Tom Dashwood?" he cried. "You doan't mean as yo'll——"

He stopped short. He dared not speak the thought that rose to his mind, but Joe laughed.

"You'm mighty nash," he said. "Yes, it's Tom Dashwood I mean. 'E's to come in 'ere and that bit o' the roof's got t'fall on 'im and shut 'im in. D'ye see?"

Bill shivered. His face had whitened and his eyes glanced uneasily about the empty blackness. He wetted his dry lips and stepped a little farther away from Joe.

"Yo' cawn't mean it," he gasped.

"I tell yo' I do," said Joe, "and yo'll 'elp, or it'll be a bad look out for yer."

He stared steadily into Bill's terrified eyes, and Bill remem-

bering certain unpleasant things that Joe knew, cringed suddenly.

"Oh, let us off this, Joe," he cried wildly. "Yo' doan't want me to 'elp—I couldn't do yo' no good—yo'll let me off, Joe?"

Joe set his teeth.

"Yo'll 'elp," he said doggedly. "Yo'll get Tom Dashwood inter this 'ere place to-morrow night, jest afore we go up, an' I shall be 'ere ter see as 'e is shut out o' the way. It's you as'll 'ave to bring 'im 'ere. 'E won't trust me, but 'e'll come for yo', and yo'll do it I tell yo', Bill."

Bill hesitated.

"It's all for nought," he whispered after a minute. "There ain't nought t' be got out o' it. An' us might swing fo' it."

"Us might," said Joe grimly, "but us won't. An' I tell yo' if 'e's once out o' the way Bessie'll marry me, and 'er uncle's got a bit o' money saved. There'll be a bit fo' yo' on our wedding day, Bill."

Bill's eyes hovered, wandered uneasily into the blackness of the pit and came back again. From the distance came the slow click click of a pick against the coal and the rattle of a car as it rolled along the rail.

"'Ow much would it be?" he asked at last.

"I'd promise yo' ten pun," Joe said, "ten pun an' p'raps more, an' we should be married afore Christmas."

Bill's eyes brightened and grew greedy. He looked back at the corridor and away from the cave.

"I'll do it," he said slowly, and then he began edging rapidly away from the yawning cave with the loose coal hanging over it.

It would be easy enough—ten pounds easily earned—to bring a man to that spot and push him in!

* * * * *

Bessie stood with her hand on Tom's shoulder, with her eyes looking up into his.

"Oh I don't trust him, Tom. He means ill to you. Promise me you'll take care, Tom?"

Tom laughed down at her. His face was full of the morning sunshine and he showed no trace of fear.

"Oh, you're a regular woman, Bess—full of fancies. But I'll take care, sweetheart. Never fear. He won't harm me."

"But he was so savage, Tom." Her eyes were serious and she refused to smile. "He frightens me. He swore he would marry me and he swore he would be even with me. Tom, darling, promise you won't even speak to him?"

Tom hesitated.

"It might make bad blood," he said, "but I promise if you're so set on it. I could manage to work away from him—at the far end of the shaft, and I will if it will make you feel happier, little woman?"

She sighed and he bent and kissed her and then set out for the pit.

It was early morning and there was a scent of hay and summer roses in the air, and the dreary blackness of the pit as he descended depressed him that morning. It seemed to him too that Joe, as he stood opposite to him in the "cage," had something ugly in his look as Bessie had said. Perhaps it was not all her imagination after all.

Still, Joe said nothing and the day passed without a word being exchanged between them. They worked in the same shaft, almost side by side.

They were expecting the whistle to sound every moment, when Bill edged up to Tom. His eyes, shifty and blood-shot, sank uneasily as Tom turned.

"Coom awa' from th' rest," he whispered. "I want t'speak t'ye."

Tom threw down his pick and straightened himself.

"What's the trouble now, Bill?" he asked.

Bill shuffled uneasily away from him, and shut his eyes and thoughts to the easy good nature of Tom's face, and the happy ring of his voice. He shut from him the thought of how soon that voice was to be silenced, and strode up the narrow corridor with his eyes on the black ground.

"Coom right away from them," he whispered again. "Right away so's they can't 'ear."

Tom obeyed unsuspectingly and they turned the bend out of sight, and went on up to the little cave where they were out of earshot too.

There Bill stopped.

"Hark ye, what was that?" he said abruptly.

It was the signal he and Joe had agreed upon, and as he spoke a dark figure sprang from the ground and tried to throw something over Tom's face. As he did so Tom staggered backwards, and his lantern which he had in his hand was dashed from him against the black wall.

There was a crash and then utter darkness, and Tom felt himself flung suddenly savagely to the floor.

He fell blindly, with a stunning crash, against a hard corner, and immediately everything grew confused. He was conscious of a dull rush of falling coal—instinct made him spring to his feet, and then a sudden blackness swept down upon him.

* * * * * *

When he opened his eyes it was to look round upon utter blackness. He drew a deep breath and tried to lift his head, but it was curiously heavy and ached maddeningly. He tried to cry out and could not. His lips were parched; his throat was dry and even to swallow was painful.

He lay still for a minute or two, and then made another effort and sat up. Where was he? His eyes strained through the darkness and could discover nothing. He put out his hands and groped blindly until they came in contact with a rough, dusty surface. Coal!

He caught his breath. He remembered now, and his heart began to beat. He remembered the struggle at the mouth of the cave—he remembered Bill and the face of Joe who had sprung at him suddenly out of the darkness. He remembered the rush of coal before he had become unconscious, and a sudden fear seized him. He was still in the mine, but where?

With an effort he raised himself to his knees and began groping painfully and blindly along. He crawled forward, his eyes trying to pierce the blackness ahead and seeing nothing!

He went on—on and on—his hands and knees blundering painfully over the uneven floor, and his heart throbbing—throbbing until it seemed to him that a thousand machines were at work within it.

How long he went on he did not know, but he fell exhausted at last with blackness still around him and machines still hammering at his head.

* * * * * *

A fall of coal in the mine and some men reported buried underneath!

A crowd of people stood at the pit's mouth, waiting with anxious faces for some further news. No one could tell as yet who had lost a husband, father or brother in the cruel pit, and they were waiting.

The report came soon enough. A fall of coal had completely blocked up the mouth of a small cave and part of a shaft, and men were required at once to set to work to force a way through.

There were plenty of volunteers and they worked all night through, without success. The fall had been heavier than

had been supposed and it seemed almost hopeless to find an entrance through the dead weight of solid coal.

But they worked hard and pluckily and they were still chopping at the black blocks when the men went down again next morning.

Joe and Bill were amongst them, Bill staring down into the black depths as if he were afraid, and Joe with an odd light in his eyes.

They were to work in a different place this morning—in a shaft at some distance away from the one in which the fall had taken place, and Joe, at least, was relieved.

He and Bill were side by side, and they had been working for some time with the other men at a short distance from them, when a sound made him look up. It was a sound like the shuffling of feet on the coal.

The sound came on, slowly, hesitatingly—scrape, scrape, over the rough floor. It made a weird accompaniment to the chip of the men's picks farther down the corridor, and a strange thrill ran down Joe's spine. Bill shrank back against the wall. He was afraid.

Joe stood, lantern in hand, waiting. And as he waited, peering into the darkness it seemed to him that there was an echo somewhere—a whisper that was carried from side to side of the shaft.

He drew a deep breath and something cold and clammy broke out upon his forehead. The light of the lantern began to shake and dance upon the shining black walls as his hand began to tremble, and there came to him a wild longing to scream.

Still he stood, and the slow shuffle of footsteps came nearer. Bill retreated backwards as it came. Then suddenly Joe dashed his lantern to the ground and turned.

His face was livid, his eyes were starting from his head.

He had seen the ghost of Tom Dashwood!

He turned and ran, shouting as he went. The other men who had been working with him ran too—back to the entrance and shouted wildly up the mouth of the pit.

When they got them up at last Bill was insensible and Joe was muttering something incoherent about Tom Dashwood—that he was lying buried underneath a heap of fallen coal—that he himself had pushed him in with his own hands and that his ghost was walking the mine!

The news circulated like wildfire—that the mine was haunted, and for some time none of the hands would venture down. A panic threatened, and then at last came a cage full of men bearing two bodies—the unconscious one of Will Medwin, and the half-fainting one of Tom Dashwood.

Will was carried straight to the hospital five miles away and Tom went to be tended by Bessie.

He was not hurt seriously, and in a day or two he was himself again, but with Will it was different and for weeks he hung between life and death.

When at last he was able to speak things became clear. He had been suspicious and afraid of Joe and he set to work to watch him, and when he saw him make for the cave he had followed him and lain in wait and watched.

When they had sprung upon Tom he had sprung too, dashing the lantern to the ground with the result that in the confusion Joe pushed *him* in the cave instead of Tom.

It was a narrow escape—so narrow that for many months afterwards Will felt the effects of it, and when Bessie and Tom came to see him she looked at his bandaged face with a shiver.

"You've saved my Tom's life," was all she said, but she could say no more for her heart was full, and she was thinking of Joe raving about his ghost in the county asylum.

Will looked up at them.

"It was only tit for tat," he said, "he saved *my* life once. And I knew Joe meant mischief."

Bessie's eyes were full.

"I shall never forget," she said. "It was my life as well as his for I couldn't ever live without him"—which flattery was enough to spoil any man, as Will told her.

But she says it hasn't spoilt Tom.

Annie O. Tibbits.

The Literary Editress.

And her Reply to the Humorous Editor.

The office boy came into the room of the Literary Editress, placed a letter upon her table, and quickly retired.

The busy little lady opened it mechanically, shaking it a bit as she did so and looking into the envelope for stray stamps.

The contribution was written in pencil upon a single sheet of "copy paper," and was as follows:

Office Humorous Editor,
Weekly Insanity.

Dear Miss Crit,—Please allow me to offer to you my Heart and Hand. Will you kindly consider as favourably as possible and accept if you find available, unless you are already more than supplied with offerings of a similar nature.

Very sincerely yours,
A. Blue Jester.

The little lady sat looking at the MS. for a long time, with a more pleased expression upon her face than was usual with her while examining the communications which came to her during office hours. At last she took from the pigeon holes in her desk two little printed forms, laid them side by side upon the desk before her, and gazed at them for a long time, with more interest than she usually bestowed upon them. They were inscribed as follows:

The Literary Editor of the *Weekly Insanity* takes pleasure in informing you that your..... is accepted with thanks.

The Literary Editor of the *Weekly Insanity* regrets that your.....is not available at this time. Rejection does not necessarily imply lack of merit, or that acceptance in some other quarter is improbable, but simply that what you offer does not just now seem desirable.

Neither of the forms seemed to fit the case exactly, and drawing a pad of paper towards her, she dashed off the following:

Office Literary Editor,
Weekly Insanity.

Dear Mr. Jester,—In declining unsolicited offerings, it has not hitherto been my custom to give any reasons for so doing—the great number received rendering individual comments impossible—but in the case of your "Heart and Hand" I feel that some explanation is due to you.

I have never before had occasion to consider a MS. such as yours, and, for once in my life, I am obliged to confess that I am somewhat at a loss. However, I think it best not to accept anything of the kind—for some time to come, at least.

There is, no doubt, good material in what you offer, but there are a hundred reasons, any one of which would prevent acceptance. True, I have not on hand, or engaged, anything of a similar nature, but at the same time the demand does not seem very pressing just at present.

Thanking you for the privilege of being allowed to consider your offering, and with regret that I do not find it available,

I remain, yours very truly,
Laura Crit.

P.S.—On sober second thoughts and a second reading, I have changed my mind; and, though not available just at present, if you care to wait a year or so for publication, will accept, with thanks, the "Heart and Hand" you offer. L. C.

And Miss Crit folded the sheet methodically, frowned slightly because Mr. Jester had neglected to inclose a self-addressed envelope, and a moment later the office boy was speeding down the corridor with a message which made the *Insanity's* humourist happy.

Arthur Worksop.

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A 'Bus Driver's Story.

A Romance from Real Life of which he was a Witness.

THE other day I overheard a lady say to her companion as they sat on the front seat of my 'bus: "Dear me! how very monotonous the life of a 'bus driver must be!"

Her friend agreed with her, and they fell to thinking of other things. I couldn't help smiling to myself as I slowed up for a fat woman in blue, who was running frantically down a side street to catch my 'bus. I remembered the lady's remark as the fat woman climbed pantingly up the step and found a seat inside.

Monotonous? Well, yes, I suppose so, in a way. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year upon year, I see the same streets, the same houses, the same people.

Long ago it got to be second nature for me to put on the brake, to stop and start, to wait for frantic fat women in blue, for feeble old men with canes, for worried mothers with their brood of half a dozen youngsters.

In my dreams I hear my conductor's short, sharp whistle, or his "All right," or his "Wait till the 'bus stops, lady!" which, by the way, always makes the lady cross—I wonder why?

Yes, I suppose a 'bus driver's life might be considered monotonous, but—well, we don't have much time for reading except the daily paper, but we sometimes see, lived out before our very eyes, a love story—a comedy—sometimes a tragedy.

It is more interesting than all the novels in the bookseller's shop!

They are live men and women—human, oh, how human!—creatures of flesh and blood, of joys and sorrows, of ups and downs; in fact, just commonplace, everyday people—like a 'bus driver, for instance. It is the best reading in the world, and books like these a fellow can read and earn his bread and butter at the same time.

When I first began to notice her she was a modest, brown-eyed little girl of perhaps seventeen, with an armful of dreary-looking books, going to school.

She always rode on my 'bus in the morning. There were always several school girls on the 'bus laughing, chattering, eating sweets—some of them—and casting coquettish glances—some of them—at my conductor, a good-looking young fellow.

They never gave me any of those laughing glances out of the corner of blue eyes or grey, for I'm old enough to have a girl of my own at school. God bless her! and there is a good sprinkling of silver in my hair.

But the little brown-eyed girl I'm telling you of—the other girls called her "Ruth"—was modest and quiet and well-bred—always.

You couldn't look at her without thinking of something pure and clean—a wild rose or a violet, or some such thing.

You wanted to pat her shoulder, or smooth her brown hair, or be good to her in some way or other. Now, you wouldn't believe a 'bus driver would be so susceptible to the charms of a simple little schoolgirl, would you?

When I first began to notice Smith, he was a clear-eyed, laughing-faced young fellow of about twenty-two. He worked in the City in one of the banks.

I don't know just what he had to do, neither do you care, but he always took my 'bus, and after a little I noticed him looking a good deal at Ruth.

Well, you know how such things will go on and on. It went on for a whole year right under my eyes. Neither of them dreamt the 'bus driver was watching and listening.

Smith was in love with the girl—that was as plain as she was pretty. Blame him? I'd have blamed him if he wasn't.

Well, it was as pretty a little romance as you ever read in a popular novel. She wasn't the flirty kind, you understand—just a dear little, commonplace, everyday sort of a girl that loved her mother and wasn't ashamed of her father!

One morning someone introduced them, and after that everything went on as smooth as glass. At the end of a year they were married.

In the first weeks of their honeymoon she often rode down on the 'bus with him in the morning, and if ever I saw a happy pair it was that pair! You'd think there couldn't a thing happen to cast a shadow on such happiness, but——

Well, they hired a pretty house on the line of route, and almost every time my 'bus passed I could catch glimpses of the little bride. Sometimes with a big, white apron on, sweeping the steps, sometimes picking violets from the bed in front of the house, sometimes chatting with a neighbour over the fence, as women dearly love to do.

Whatever she was about she was sweet and dainty and fresh as a wild rose.

I grew to look for her whenever my 'bus drove past, and somehow the house didn't look just natural when she wasn't in sight. Now, you wouldn't believe, would you, that a commonplace 'bus driver could be so sentimental?

That shadow I was speaking of a while ago—well, it came.

Smith was a jovial young fellow, and I suppose he couldn't say "no" when the gay set he fell in with said 'Come on Smith, it's my treat!"—much less when they said, "Smith, it's your treat this time!"

I suppose he began just like ten thousand other fine fellows, a little at a time, until—well, this isn't a temperance lecture, just an everyday sort of story of a man named Smith and the best and dearest little woman who ever bore that familiar name.

One night he rode home on my 'bus at 11 o'clock. I slowed up in front of the house and watched him get off. He was—well, he wasn't himself, that's all.

The front door was open and the red-shaded lamp shone out its bright welcome. A girlish figure ran down the steps and out to the gate. She had on a white dress, and her brown hair was hanging in one long braid.

She ran up to him and held out her hands.

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"Jack! Jack!" she cried; "oh, I've been so anxious——"

I could hear Jack's thick voice trying to tell her something as he staggered in at the gate. And then I went on and left them. Do you know, I had a real heartache? Honestly, I did. That little girl—that tipsy fellow——

When my 'bus came back past the house, the red lamp was out. I wondered if she wasn't crying somewhere alone in the dark!

I wished I had hold of Smith; it seemed to me as though I would give a month's wages to shake him till his teeth chattered! And still—poor fool! his worst fault was his unfailing good-nature and his weakness of will.

Often and often after that I had to see the little tragedy played over again. She would come out to the street to meet him—always. Once, when he was worse than usual, she turned up to me such a white, pleading little face that I choked all up. I tell you, if ever there was heartache in a pair of brown eyes, I saw it that night.

After a while Smith lost his position at the bank, and hung about at home for a while with nothing to do. When he kept away from the city and his gay friends, he seemed to do better.

I saw him at work, mowing the lawn in his shirt sleeves, tying up her rose bushes and making lettuce and onion beds in the small garden at the back of the house.

She was sometimes out with him in her pink sunbonnet, helping here and there, and watching him with sad, brown eyes. Strange how two short years can take the sparkle out of a pair of brown eyes and the rose colour out of a face!

One day the doctor's horse and trap stood at the gate, and it looked strangely quiet about the place.

A few days later my heart gave a sudden jump as I went by, for out on the line, at the back of the house, hung a lot of snow-white baby clothes—little shirts and dresses, you know, and all that sort of thing—and there was a motherly old face at the window, smiling over a little bundle of white flannel on her lap. You see, the house is near the street, and a fellow can't help seeing.

Well, do you know, it's a fact that what even those soft, brown eyes couldn't do with that fellow Smith, a pair of little red fists did do. It's a fact that Smith braced himself up and became a good deal of a man.

When the baby was a week old he swung himself on to my 'bus and went back to his work in the bank. It seemed the bank folks liked him, and were willing to take him back on trial.

I smiled at the happy-faced young fellow as he sang out "hello" to me, as usual, and I said "there never was another like it, I suppose?"

He grinned all over, and blushed like a girl.

"You just ought to see him!" he said. "He's a fine, big fellow—weighs ten pounds. She's named him 'Jack,' after his dad! Original-sounding name, isn't it?—Jack Smith." He laughed. Smith always had a wholesome laugh.

Well, that was three years ago. Smith is all right yet, and I've got over worrying about him.

For a time I'll own I was pretty anxious about the chap. I've seen so many cases of relapse, and all that, you know, but Smith held out and behaved himself, like the fine fellow he is.

Smith and his wife and little Jack ride with me pretty often. On Sunday afternoon they go to the park. At Christmas-time they take the youngster to town to see Santa Claus at the big shops.

They always have a pleasant word for the driver as they sit down on the front seat of my 'bus, and more than once the little fellow has handed me down a bunch of violets with his father's own smile—a smile that shows the nicest little white teeth and two dimples in a pair of rose-tinted cheeks.

His eyes are brown—like hers—but he is his father's image in everything else. And that little woman—well, well, the happiness of that honeymoon wasn't a patch to the happiness of to-day, and I know it!

Yes, I think there are few things more monotonous than the life of a 'bus driver, but—well I don't know!

H. F. Crocket.

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SERIAL STORY.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

Piecing the Puzzle.

THE two waited to hear no more. They ran upstairs and Talbot would twice have fallen had not Brett supported him.

Reaching the corridor which contained their apartments, they found Sir Hubert, Lord Fairholme, Daubeney, and Mr. Winter, standing silently, a sorrowful, motionless group, outside Edith's room.

"What terrible thing has happened?" Brett asked them. "Surely Miss Talbot cannot be seriously hurt?"

The only one who could answer was Mr. Winter.

"We hope not sir," he said, "but the doctors will be here in a moment. They are extracting the bullet now."

Before the bewildered barrister could frame another question the door of Edith's room opened noiselessly, and two Italian gentlemen emerged. One of them spoke English well.

He addressed himself to Sir Hubert Fitzjames.

"I am glad to tell you," he said cheerfully, "that the young lady's wound is not at all dangerous. It looks worse than it is. Most fortunately, the bullet first struck a large bone button on her coat. This, combined with the thick woollen material, and some small amount of padding placed beneath the collar by the maker, offered such resistance that the bullet lodged itself against the collar bone without breaking it. Consequently, although the wound has a nasty appearance, it is not at all serious. The young lady herself makes light of it. Indeed, she thought that an anæsthetic was unnecessary, but of course we administered one prior to extraction and she is now resting quietly."

"You are not deceiving us, doctor? Tell us the truth, for Heaven's sake." It was Fairholme's voice, broken and hollow, that so fiercely uttered these words.

The kindly doctor turned and placed his hand upon the earl's shoulder.

"I would not dream of such a thing," he answered. "It would be cruel to raise false hopes if the young lady's condition were really dangerous. Believe me, there is nothing to fear. With the careful attention she will receive, she will be well able to travel within a week, though, of course, the wound will not be fully healed for a lengthy period."

Sir Hubert managed to stammer:

"When can we see her?"

"As soon as she wakes from sleep. We have given her a small draught, you understand, to secure complete rest after the shock of the operation. My colleague and I will return here at eight o'clock, and then there will probably be no reason why you should not speak to her. Meanwhile be confident; there is absolutely no cause for alarm."

With this reassuring statement they had perforce to rest content. The medical men were about to take their departure when Brett intervened:

"There is yet another patient who requires your attention, gentlemen," he said. "You will find him in room No. 41. He is suffering from a broken arm and other injuries."

The doctors hurried off, and it was not long before they were able to make a satisfactory report concerning Dubois.

"The fracture of the ulna is a simple one," said the spokesman, "and will become all right in the ordinary course of nature. But what happened to the man's face?"

"He settled a slight dispute with my friend here," said Brett, indicating Talbot, who was leaning with his head wearily resting upon his hands, for the accident to Edith had utterly unnerved her brother.

"Then all I can say," remarked the doctor, when he took his leave, "is that the settlement was complete. Whatever the debt may have been, it is paid in full!"

The Englishmen were now safe in the seclusion of a private room, so Brett resolved to arouse Talbot from the stupor which had settled upon him.

"Listen to me, Jack," he said. "You must pull yourself together. Don't forget you have an important trust to discharge. Our first duty is to ascertain whether or not the diamonds are intact."

He laid on the table the belt taken from Dubois, and lifted out its precious contents with careful exactness.

The men crowded around, for even amidst the exciting events of the hour, the sight of the fateful stones which had caused so much turmoil and bloodshed could not fail to be deeply interesting.

Predominant amongst them was the Imperial diamond, luminous, gigantic, awesome in its potentialities. Its size and known value rendered it one of the most remarkable objects in the world, whilst even in its present unfinished state the facets already cut by the workmen gave evidence of its brilliant purity.

Pulling himself together by an effort, Talbot advanced to the table and slowly counted the stones. There were fifty-one all told, and even the smallest of the collection was a diamond of great value.

"Yes," he said, "that is the correct number. I cannot be certain, but I believe they are the originals. The big one certainly is. It will be one of the happiest days of my life when I see the last of them."

"That day will arrive soon," remarked Brett quietly. "You and I, Mr. Winter, must sail on the *Blue-Bell* to-night for Marseilles. That is, if Mr. Daubeney is agreeable," he added, turning to that worthy gentleman, whose face was a trifle paler than it had been for years.

"I am at your service, gentlemen," he announced promptly.

"But what about Fairholme and the young lady?" he went on, turning to Sir Hubert.

"I think I understand," replied the baronet. "Mr.

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Brett means that these wretched diamonds should pass officially out of the control of the British Government as early as possible."

The barrister nodded.

"That being so, no time should be lost. Edith, should all go well, will in any event be compelled to remain here for several days before she can be removed. You, Jack, and you, Mr. Brett, should you so desire, can easily return here from London, after having fulfilled the trust reposed in you."

"Then I only make one stipulation," put in Daubeney quickly. "The *Blue-Bell* will remain in Marseilles and bring you back."

Dubois Explains.

His eagerness evoked a quiet smile all round, and it was generally agreed that this programme should be followed. In the brief discussion which followed, Mr. Winter explained his earlier movements. The detectives attached to the British Embassy in Paris told him of Dubois' journey to Marseilles.

Learning that Brett was staying at the Hotel du Louvre et de la Paix, he went straight there on his arrival, only to learn that the barrister and some friends had quitted Marseilles that day on a private yacht bound for Palermo. The local police filled in some of the details, but chance did the rest.

Going to the P. and O. office to book his passage to Messina on the *Ganges*, he heard of Grosjean and the Turks, and then knew that he was on the right scent.

There was a touching meeting between Edith and the others that evening. She was naturally pale and weak, but her buoyant spirit triumphed over physical defects, and she made light of her injuries.

Even Fairholme was restored to a state of sanity by his brief visit, a fact that was evidenced by his quiet enjoyment of a cigar when he walked down to the quay to witness the departure of the *Blue-Bell*.

Before leaving Palermo Brett had another interview with the Chief of Police, the result being that unobtrusive but effective means were taken to safeguard the different members of the gang which had caused so much personal suffering and diplomatic uneasiness.

The reception of the party in London may be detailed in a sentence.

The Turkish Ambassador was specially instructed from Constantinople to take charge of the diamonds, and Talbot had the keen satisfaction of personally handing them over to the Sultan's representative, in the presence of his chief, at the Foreign Office.

The unlucky gems were forthwith taken back to their owner, and no doubt repose at this moment in a special reliquary, together with other mementoes of the Prophet, for the project which led to their first visit to London was definitely abandoned.

Meanwhile daily telegrams from Palermo assured Talbot and Brett as to the continued progress of the fair sufferer, who had so nearly sacrificed her life in her devoted championship of her brother's cause.

At last a day came when the *Blue-Bell* again steamed into the harbour of Palermo, and the manner in which Fairholme shouted when he caught sight of Daubeney standing on the bridge was in itself sufficient indication that all had gone well during their absence.

The travellers were surprised and delighted to find Edith herself seated in a carriage with her uncle on the wharf. Were it not that she was a trifle pale, and her right arm was tightly strapped across her breast to prevent any movement of the injured shoulder, no one could have guessed that she had recently undergone such a terrible experience.

But Brett, delighted as he was to meet his friends again under such pleasant conditions, experienced the keenest sentiments of triumphant elation when he entered the apartment where Dubois was still confined under the watchful guard of two detectives.

Talbot accompanied him. The young Englishman had by

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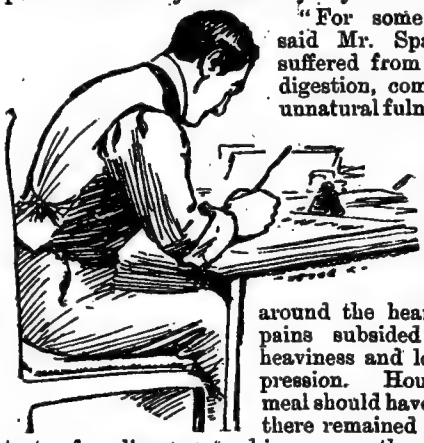
Mr. Sparks communicated with a representative of the *Southern Daily Mail*, to whom he stated that he was employed as a ticket and show-card writer at an establishment in Russell Street, Southsea, and his occupation kept him in confined space and a sitting position for many hours every day without a break.



"For some years past," said Mr. Sparks, "I have suffered from attacks of indigestion, commencing with unnatural fulness after meals, followed by flatulence, a feeling of a heavy weight at the chest, sharp pains between the shoulders and around the heart. When the pains subsided they left a heaviness and low-spirited depression. Hours after one meal should have been digested there remained a disagreeable taste of undigested food in my mouth. Meantime the flatulence increased, gases seemed to accumulate, giving me severe pains moving about the lower part of the body, and a heavy, sinking sensation in the pit of the stomach. I was stubbornly constipated, and believing this to be the secret of my whole condition, I tried various opening medicines. The effect of these were only momentary and left me soon after more costive than before. I gradually became worse, until it was impossible to take an interest in my work—life, in fact, was a burden.

"A pamphlet about Bile Beans fell into my hands, and I found in it descriptions of cases so like mine that had been cured that I was led to try the Beans. They quickly rid me of constipation, and kept me free from wind and disagreeable sensation. A few weeks' continuance of the use of Bile Beans completely changed me into a bright, healthy, light-hearted fellow. Though I have been cured months now I take a Bean occasionally, as I find they keep me in splendid form. They are, indeed, a wonderful medicine."

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this time quite forgiven his enemy. He felt that he was more than quits with him. Indeed he was the first to speak when they came together.

"I am sorry to see it is your turn to be trussed up in bed, Dubois," he said. "How are you feeling now? Getting along all right, I hope."

The Frenchman did not answer him directly. A faint smile illumined his pale face. He turned to Brett with a nonchalant question:

"Mr. Brett, have you any influence with those two worthy Italian doctors?"

"Perhaps," said the barrister. "What is it you want?"

"I want a cigarette. They won't let me smoke. Surely to goodness, a cigarette won't hurt my arm."

The barrister turned a questioning glance towards the male nurse in charge of the patient, but the man did not understand what had been said.

Brett, who spoke no Italian, indicated by pantomime what it was the Frenchman required, and the attendant signified his sentiments in silent eloquence—he turned and looked out of the window. So Dubois enjoyed his cigarette in peace. He gave a sigh of great contentment, and then said, lazily:

"Now, ask me anything you like. I am ready."

"There is only one point concerning which I am really at fault," began Brett. "How did your Turkish associates manage to murder Mehemet Ali and his secretaries so quietly?"

"Oh, that was easy enough," declared the Frenchman. "You understand I was in no way responsible for the bloodletting, and indeed strongly disapproved of it."

"Yes," replied the barrister. "I believe that."

"Well, the rest of the business was simplicity itself. Hussein—the Envoy's confidential servant—was in our pay. It was, of course, absolutely necessary to have an accomplice in the house, and his price was a small one—five hundred pounds, I think. The credentials we brought, which you, Mr. Talbot, examined were not forgeries."

"How can that be?" cried Jack. "The Sultan would never be a party to a plot for his own undoing."

"Don't ask me for explanations I cannot give," responded Dubois coolly. "The exact facts of this story can only be ascertained at Yildiz Kiosk, and I do not suppose that anyone there will ever tell you. No doubt you saw for yourself that Mehemet Ali was convinced. Were it not for you, he would have given up control that night. But you and your policemen, and your confounded English notions of right and wrong, rendered necessary the adoption of the second part of the plan we had decided upon, in case the first by chance miscarried. After I left the house with you, Hussein brought in more coffee. That which he and my Turkish friends drank was all right. The beverage given to Mehemet Ali and his secretaries was drugged."

"Ah," interrupted Brett, "that explains everything. But why was Hussein killed?"

"That is another matter, which only a Turk can explain. These fellows believe in the knife or a piece of whipcord as ending unpleasant difficulties most effectually. You see they were not ordinary rogues. They pretended to be conspirators actuated by pure political motives—motives which a common servant like Hussein could not really be expected to understand. So to close his mouth thoroughly they stabbed him whilst he was taking some loose cash from his master's pockets. Then it occurred to them that when Mehemet Ali and the others recovered from the effects of the drug, they also would be able to throw an unpleasantly strong light upon the complicity of certain high personages in Constantinople. This was sufficient reason for the adoption of strong measures, so they also were peacefully dispatched."

"But where did the knife come from?" pursued Brett. "It was not in their possession when they entered, nor when they left."

"No; of course not. Hussein brought it himself, to be used in case of necessity. He also brought the pliers, which cut the wire blinds, and the material used for concealing the broken strands subsequently. Hussein was really an excellent confederate, and I was furious when I heard that he was dead. You know how the diamonds were abstracted from the house?"

"Yes," said Brett. "They were made up into a parcel and flung through the window into the park. The knife and pliers accompanied them, I suppose?"

"The third Turk—the gentleman who pulled you down on to the bed so unceremoniously, Mr. Talbot—was waiting there for the packet. But he had to hide in the park all the night, until the gates were opened in the morning. It was a ticklish business right through. I did not know at what hour the police might discover the extent of the crime. The diamonds did not reach me until seven o'clock. And then I had some difficulty in persuading the Turks to give them up to me. You see, I had my own little plan, too, which these excellent gentlemen never suspected, as they already had paid me £5,000 for my help. But the real heads of the party were in Paris, Hussein ul Mulk and that gang, you know, and by representing the danger to their cause which would result from any attempt on the part of the Turks in London to reach France, they were at last persuaded. By nine o'clock that morning I got them safely off to the docks, where they boarded a vessel bound for Smyrna. Their passages were already booked in Armenian names. Grosjean, who had no connection with the affair personally, stayed at a small hotel in Soho in order to report all clear during the next few days. He happened by chance to travel with you and the other man. It was a clever scheme, I assure you, from beginning to end. By the way, may I trouble you for another cigarette?"

(To be concluded next week.)

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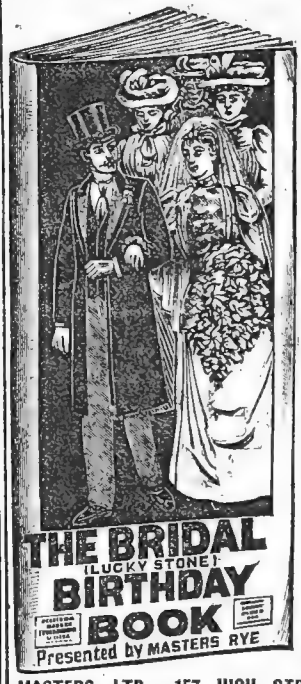

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Doctor's Orders.

She: "The doctor said you must not call any more." He: "Did he say that?" She: "Well, he said that I needed eight hours' sleep."

Hopeless.

"Tom has proposed, and asks me to give him his answer in a letter." "Shall you do it?" "No; I will be more liberal, and give him his answer in two letters."

A Deep Laid Plot.

George: "Who is that beautiful girl over there?" Amelia: "Why, George, that's a mirror—it's me!" George: "————?" Amelia (blushing): "Yes, George."

Love, Indeed!

She: "Darling, do you love me?" He (kissing her rapturously and repeatedly): "Do I? I wish you were a two-headed girl. That's all I can say." And she believed in his love.

The Engagement is Off Now.

He (pleadingly): "Why can't we be married right away?" She (coyly): "Oh, I can't bear to leave father alone just now." He (earnestly): "But, my darling, he has had you such a long time." She (freezingly): "Sir!"

Certain Proof.

He: "You are the only woman I have ever loved." She: "Do you expect me to believe that?" He: "I do. I swear it is true." She: "Then I believe you. Any man who would expect a woman to believe that cannot have been much in the company of women."

Unlucky Mrs. White.

He (reading paper): "Here's a note about an accident at White's house. The servant girl put some gunpowder into the fire, and was blown through the roof." She (sympathetically): "Poor Mrs. White has so much trouble with her girls! They are always leaving her without giving notice!"

Wanted To Make a Decision.

Girl: "Papa, I wish you'd lock up your money and pretend to fail, there's a good old dear. It needn't last more than a week or two, and there are so many failures now no one will find fault." Father: "Of all things! Wha——" Girl: "Oh, it's all right. You see, I'm engaged to nine young men, and I've got to get rid of at least eight of them somehow."

She Was Flattered.

Mrs. Sansom: "I understand, sir, that you have secretly been making love to my daughter, and I must forbid an acquaintance begun in that way. You should have seen me first." Shrewd Suitor: "Madam, had I seen you first I should have forgotten your daughter and fallen in love with you." Mrs. Sansom: "Um—the informality of the proceeding was all I objected to. Come with me and I will introduce you."

A Fair Question.

He (bitterly): "Pshaw! All women are alike." She: "Then why in the world do you spend so much time trying to find the one you want to marry?"

Papa's Match-box.

"This," said the dear girl, as she led the way into a secluded little nook in the conservatory, "is what papa calls his 'match-box.' Everybody comes in here to propose."

Her First Chance.

He (accepted): "You say you were never engaged before?" She: "Yes." He: "How does that happen? I thought all women usually had three or four engagements." She (guilelessly): "Well, I presume I shall, too. You see, this is the first chance I've had."

Appropriate Title.

He: "I wonder what the meaning of that picture is? The youth and the maiden are in a tender attitude." She: "Oh, don't you see? He has just asked her to marry him, and she is accepting him." "Ah! how appropriate the title." "I don't see it." "Why, that card at the bottom says 'Sold.'"

What We Are Coming To.

Boothby: "What are you thinking about, Ethel?" Miss Warringford: "About our wedding. I wanted to ask a favour of you." Boothby: "Anything, dearest." Miss Warringford: "Well—I don't want to change my name to Mrs. Henry Boothby. I want you to change yours to Mr. Ethel Warringford."

She Might be Engaged Then.

"I'm so glad you have come, Miss Morrison! I have so longed for a dance with you. May I have the fourth waltz?" "You may if I am not engaged." "Your card shows that you're not." "Yes—but I'm going to sit out the third waltz with Jack, and—well, I may be engaged when the fourth comes."

Her Revenge.

"Why were you so cross to your husband at breakfast?" "I couldn't help it. I felt as if I must scold somebody or burst. Just physical irritability, you know—and then everything went wrong. Breakfast was late, the bacon burnt, the coffee thin, and the bread stale." "Then why didn't you scold the cook?" "Oh, I daren't. She'd leave."

A Cool Reception.

There were plenty of empty seats in the 'bus, but the smiling youth who wore his hat on the back part of his head, stopped opposite the handsome young woman in the red hat, and said in his most engaging manner: "Can I take this seat, Miss?" "I have no objection, sir," she said, in a tone that froze the smile fast on his face, "but I think it's nailed down."

Her Share of Economy.

"My dear," said Mr. Darley to his wife, "we shall have to economise." "Very well, love," replied Mrs. Darley cheerfully. "Suppose you resign your club, give up smoking, and shave yourself." "That's a pretty programme, I must say. And what will you do as your share of our economy?" "I will cut your hair."

Only One Arm Necessary.

Jack Fiancé (gushingly): "Darling, you must not refuse me the pleasure of taking you to ride in my new horseless carriage." Daisy Hugger (apprehensively): "But—er—Jack, don't you—er—(blush)—have you to use both arms to steer those horseless carriages?" Jack Fiancé (rapturously): "No, dearest. Mine is a new pattern of pedal-steering attachment, and——" Daisy Hugger: "Oh, Jack. Say to-morrow night."

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Home Duties Versus District Visiting.

I am very glad to hear, STELLA, that you take so much interest in parish work, and do so much for the poor. You say that your father objects to you spending so much of your time visiting, and says that you should be more at home. He has, you add, often complained of the way his meals are served up, and does not accept your excuse that you are busy with your parish work. What do I think of his attitude? Do I not think that the poor people are entitled to more attention than one's own well-to-do relations?

* * * * *

Now, work among the poor is very, very good. There are many women who can rightly spend all their time at it. But I take it that every women puts her duty to her own folk first, as she was intended to do. When a girl has a father, as you have, who expects a little proper attention, it is her first duty to give it. If the world were run on any other lines, it would be a more miserable place than it is. Do as much parish work as you can,—in your spare moments—but first of all do the duties at home to which you should, as a woman, give first place.

❦❦❦

About Novel Reading.

FLO is sixteen, and is fond of reading. But her people tell her it is wrong for her to read novels. Do I agree with this?

* * * * *

While you are young, you must do as your people wish. I do not know their views on the subject of reading, but no doubt they know your tendencies better than I do. Some girls may read every book ever written, and their minds will remain as pure as if they had never read a line. Others will seek out unhealthy reading, and perhaps be injured much by it.

* * * * *

Your parents know your own nature, and no doubt are acting in your own interest in restricting your reading. A very good way out of this difficulty would be for the mother or father to read to their children. It is generally much nicer to hear someone read a story than to strain one's eyes wading through it oneself.

❦❦❦

Unnecessary Requests.

YES, B. M., I do occasionally advise readers by post, but unless the communication is of an exceptionally private nature, prefer to do so in this column. In most cases there is very little advice which I can give clients that needs privacy, seeing names are concealed; so will those readers who constantly request private answers to the most ordinary questions please remember that in the offices of a paper time is a precious commodity, and that a lot of letter writing occupies a great deal of it.

"Gadding About" at Seventy-One.

"At what age should a woman give up gadding about?" F. R. is seventy-one, and has several grandchildren. But she does not feel any older than she did twenty years ago, and finds she can get about and visit as well as a young woman. Her children, however, reproach her for this, saying that at her age she ought to stop quietly at home, and leave "gadding about" to the younger ones.

* * * * *

They are all quite wrong, F. R. So long as you feel you can get about, do so. I know many ladies of three score who are even healthier and stronger than young girls, and so long as they can enjoy life, let them do it. That notion about "giving up" on principle is nonsense. So long as one can take exercise, one should do so. It prolongs life.

❦❦❦

Is It Flirting?

SNOWDROP knows two young men, and is not sure which she likes the better. Both have a habit of waiting for SNOWDROP outside her church after service, not by arrangement. She confesses that she likes the company of either, but is not sure that she is in love. Would it be flirting for her to accept the attentions of both, as she is at present doing?

* * * * *

Well, I do not know that I should call it flirting to a very serious extent. Assuming you have not led either young man to suppose that you regard him other than as a friend, there could be no objection to your continuing on friendly terms with either. Besides, it is only right that you should give both of them a trial, in order to test which you really do like the better.

* * * * *

Another important fact will be the effect on either of them of the knowledge that you treat them both equally. If it does not lead to some declaration on the part of each, I should be surprised. I must repeat, however, that to avoid being called a flirt, you must not allow your conduct with either man to go beyond the limits of friendly acquaintanceship. If you do, then you may rightly be accused of double-dealing.

❦❦❦

Wants to be a Waitress.

SOPHIE has an unpleasant time at home, as she belongs to a large family, and has to do most of the housework. In fact, she tells me she is little more than a drudge. Supposing she could get employment as a restaurant waitress, do I think the money she would make would justify her in going out? She thinks the life could not be harder than her present one.

* * * * *

I would not recommend any girl who has parents able to keep her to take work such as that of a waitress. A very pretty girl sometimes meets the right man at a restaurant, but, generally speaking, those affairs are little better than dangerous flirtations.

* * * * *

Besides, the wages of restaurant waitresses are very, very small. Most of them start with 8s. a week, which rises to 12s. If they are promoted to behind the counter, they may in time rise to 23s.—or more. A manageress gets about 28s.—and half-pay in case of illness.

* * * * *

If a girl really needs the money, it would not be bad for her to take such work, as later on she will be independent. But I think SOPHIE will find even the drudgery of home life better than the worry and very hard work of waiting on busy diners with bad tempers.

Cynthia

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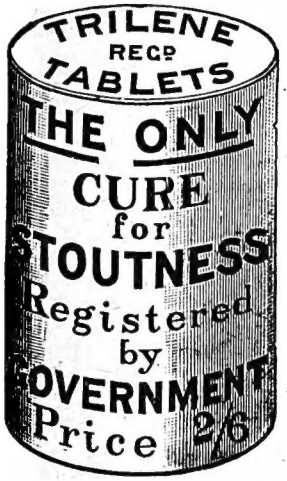

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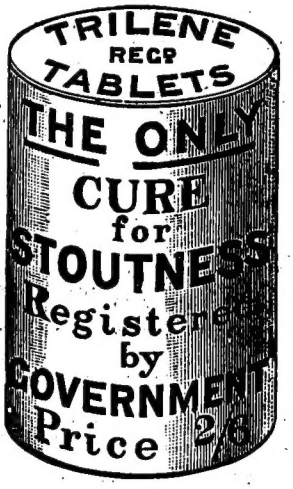

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.
Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Rediol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest valu I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

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